

THE LOVE AFFAIRS  
OF THE VATICAN

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THE VATICAN

OR

THE FAVOURITES OF THE POPES

BY

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## TO THE READER

THIS book has not been written out of malice or love of scandal. It has been conceived in a spirit of impartiality, animated by the wish to draw attention to the discrepancy existing between the noble and sublime teaching of Christ and the practice of His disciples. I have endeavoured also to show the important part played by the favourites of the Popes—those Popes who preached abstinence and contempt for women—upon the history of the Vatican and Christianity. Whilst exposing the intrigues of the Papal Court, I have not hesitated to do justice to the Popes who were worthy Vicars of Christ. In the result I hope that readers animated by a sense of justice will find no cause of offence in my book—for I have meant none.

A. S. R.

ROME, THE ETERNAL CITY,

*January, 1912.*

# THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF THE VATICAN

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY: THE SPIRITUAL PAPACY

ONE day twelve travellers, of the lowliest sort, departed, staff in hand, for a despised country. They lacked daily bread ; but they were setting out on the conquest of the world, and the world submitted to them. At their word the altars of false gods were broken, temples crumbled away, impure religions disappeared, and the colossus of the Roman Empire was thrown down. Their successors reinstated it, encircled it with the bonds of the new faith, transformed it, and breathed a soul into a society that had hitherto been merely force, intellect, sensuality, which had never known charity, love, or what Scripture calls so forcibly " the circumcision of the heart."

In the breast of their victory were found the germs of division ; heresies sprang forth. To Popes who were apostles and martyrs succeeded Popes who were theologians. They fought against opposing doctrines ; they established the unity of dogma, and at the same time the unity of the

hierarchy. They mounted to the throne of the Catholic world, and from thence surveyed, directed, and controlled all the movements of that soul which they had given it.

But another world appeared, menacing, terrible : an inundation of peoples. The Roman legions recoiled in fear. *They*, however, went to meet the barbarians, and if they did not cause their arms to fall from their hands, they softened their savage natures ; they showed them a rule, a law, a duty above orgies and violence. Pope Anastasius sustained Clovis and the Franks in their new faith, Gregory the Great converted England, part of Germany, and the Lombards of Italy ; Pelagius II. the Visigoths and Spain. The conquest of Frisia, Saxony, and the countries of the North, was the persevering work of twenty Pontiffs.

Finally Catholicism was established. From Rome flowed the living waters that gradually regenerated this troubled and impure world. The Popes struggled to teach gentleness to a violent age ; they opposed to the feudal hierarchy the idea of the equality of all men ; to turbulence, discipline ; to servitude, liberty ; to force, right. They protected the slave against the proud master, and preached the rights of women, children, and the family, to men accustomed to polygamy and divorce.

Offices of State had all become hereditary ; the Popes showed a different principle by the free election of abbots, bishops, the Pontiff himself ; and serfs sat in the chair of St. Peter, above kings.

The barbarians destroyed ancient civilisation ; the Pontiffs gathered up the relics, and treasured them in monasteries. They were the masters of religion, and also of thought, art, and science. The great scholars, who taught the world to think again, the masters who have given to Christianity its most notable monuments, belong to the Church. The spiritual power desired nothing worldly, and lo ! it had all. It governed souls and also kingdoms and states.

Islam menaced ; the Church made it draw back, and seized from it Jerusalem. Urban II threw a million crusaders upon Asia. Local churches languished in torpor ; the manners of feudal society had corrupted them. Gregory VII violently shook the tree, which only gave bitter fruits, and caused abuses and vices to fall from it

The German Emperor revived the pretensions of the Roman Emperors ; he put the spiritual independence of the Church in peril, at the same time that he endangered that of the world. Had he been successful, it would have been the end of all liberty ; a soldier would have crushed it in his iron gauntlet ; Frederick II even thought of making himself Pope, Gregory VII, Alexander III, and Innocent IV strove and triumphed.

What was their force for this great combat ? Where were their citadels, their provinces, the soldiers, and the treasure necessary ? They did not even possess those few acres of land of which so many holy men have spoken with a supreme

disdain; they did not know where to lay their heads, and yet they exiled those who called themselves masters of the world, and named the kings of Europe their vassals.

These kings, freed from feudal service, considered themselves above all law, because they were above all resistance. Innocent III made the thunders of the Church rumble over their heads; he excommunicated a usurping king in Norway, a king of Aragon who coined false money, the perjured and traitorous John of England, and Philip Augustus of France, who had repudiated his wife the day after their marriage, and married again.

When force alone ruled, the Popes constituted themselves the guardians of the moral law; and if princes offended, they raised their realms in insurrection, absolving their subjects from their oath of fealty. The Papacy thus lent its support to popular rights.

Such is the Papacy that the world admired and venerated. But there is another, the secular Papacy, the one that chose to assume the crown and bare the sword—Papacy which indulged in a life of licentiousness and debauchery, and which trod under foot the noble teachings of Christ. And it is of the discrepancy existing between the sublime teachings of the Master and the practice of many of His vicars that I treat in the following pages, where I especially show the important part played by the favourites and mistresses of the Popes in the history of the Vatican and Christianity.



Many are the ladies of easy virtue, who, modest and passive, are content to traffic in their charms, that they may rule over and hold under their sway some obscure private individual—their name is legion, and their psychology is studied by the sociologist, the philanthropist and the social reformer. The historian, however, has to deal with the splendid sinners who have made history, and who, by their charm and intelligence, have ruled over the rulers of the world.

Woman's influence has often been paramount. Not only has she seduced and captivated sovereigns and kings, earth's temporal rulers, and through them exercised her influence over nations and kingdoms; but even the Catholic Church, its spiritual hierarchy, which owed its great power and its rapid spread to woman, has been dominated by her. It is the subtle revenge of woman that she, whom man—unjustly—has striven to subjugate and to dominate, is constantly dominating him.

Seduced and captured by the Catholic Church, woman, with all the irregularity of her nature—with the ardour of her passions and the impulsiveness of her enthusiasm—threw herself in adoration before the Church. But woman is constant in her inconstancy, and she soon took her revenge. In her turn, she, for whom the Church had expressed an utter contempt, looking down upon her as upon a source of evil and sin, yet not disdaining to use her as an instrument of propaganda, ruled where she

but also outside progress and humanity ; and what is more, he plunged it into the furnace of illicit passions, into the mire of corruption and hypocrisy.

I pursue a double aim in this work, namely, on the one hand to point out the influence of women upon the government of the Catholic Church, and, on the other, to show the immorality of the Catholic clergy, which is the direct and necessary result of the law of enforced celibacy. Voluntary celibacy in itself has often been praised. It is a celestial flower, whose beauty and fragrance stamp it as one of the most precious growths in the garden of ethical religion. It is blossoming in the hearts of many men and women, of ancient and modern philosophers, of priests and nuns, of heroes and scientists, and its magic freshness often brings joy to God and man alike. This wonderful flower, exhaling such a beautiful perfume, which has inspired many martyrs and heroes, grows in many noble hearts, but it is quite different from the enforced celibacy of the Catholic clergy.

I do not say that I consider the type of monk or nun as the ideal of humanity or of womanhood. Many of those who pass their lives in their cells in fruitless meditation are non-values, from a social point of view. There is an ascetic form of selfishness, as was the mode of life of the anchorites of early Christianity, and of the beggar-philosophers of pagan antiquity. But there are some among them who, whilst turning their backs on human love, on carnal pleasures, become servants of the

poor. They quit a life of joy and laughter and fashion, in order to devote their existence to a labour of charity and pity. There are some for whom the common joys and pleasures of life are not made. There are some men—and women, too—who are too good for these pleasures and joys; they have, as Nietzsche once said, "something more urgent and more important to do than to marry. Heavens, that is how it happened with me." And that is how it happened and still happens with many thinkers and dreamers who remain single. But all these individuals chose celibacy voluntarily.

The author of the "*Génie du Christianisme*," has woven a veil of poetry over sacerdotal celibacy, and mystic philosophers have sung its praises in glowing terms. But the Catholic Church has failed, not in honouring the priest who forsakes father and mother, family life, love, and affection, to follow the Lord, but in submitting a multitude to an iron rule, and forcing ordinary men to adopt the life and conduct which only a select few are capable of, thus only compelling them to become hypocritical and immoral. None of the religions of antiquity had introduced such institutions: Greece had only two priestesses who had to make the vow of celibacy, and Rome counted not more than six or seven vestals. But in Hellas, as well as in Rome, it was a voluntary celibacy. Among the Jews, too, one occasionally finds a Ben Asai and a Ben Zoma, men who never married because they were betrothed to

the law, and had made its study the occupation of their lives, just as one will find among the great thinkers, philosophers, and poets of all ages, a Nietzsche or a Spinoza here, and a Kant there, men who, like the soothsayers' birds of antiquity, fly singly.

But between a voluntary celibacy of the individual and the enforced law to which a number of clergymen have to submit—what a vast difference ! The individuals are not wasted ; they cannot be considered non-values from a social point of view : they are creators in many other ways.

Although the Bishops of Rome were all married during the first four or five centuries, there were many love affairs in the Vatican even in those days, and the gallant intrigues of the priests were numerous. Thus, in the fourth century Bishop Damasus is accused by his deacons of adultery. The proofs were against him, but the Emperor Gratianus, afraid of scandal, suppressed the whole affair. Gradually, however, public opinion was in favour of the celibacy of the priests ; and in the fifth century the majority of the higher clergy remained unmarried, and it is at that period that the love affairs of the Vatican really begin. The more the people were convinced that the unmarried priests were nobler and holier than those burdened with wives and children, the greater the excesses and the unbridled licence of the higher clergy. Indeed, the favourites of the Popes soon began to rule Christendom, and there are periods in the

history of the Papacy to which one may apply the words: "And women rule over us."

-What was to happen in several Courts of Europe a few centuries later: the rule of women, of favourites, and of mistresses, had already taken place at the Court of the Vicars of Christ in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

No doubt, there may have been some among the Pontiffs, archbishops, bishops, and lower clergy, who were great and quite capable of such a sacrifice, and who, for the sake of the love of God, could scorn the love of woman! They could say, with Matthew,\* "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake."

There were, and I shall even go as far as to say that there still are, members of the Catholic clergy who take the vow of celibacy perfectly seriously, who lead pure and abstinent lives; and whatever one's private views are, one cannot help feeling respect, coupled with admiration, for those who, for the sake of an ideal, of the love of God, show so much heroism and nobility in renouncing for ever youth, life, and love. The spiritualised man and woman, even if we ourselves feel incapable of attaining to their heights, command our respect! Heroism is never wasted, martyrdom, even in a

\* Matthew xix. 12

cause which may be incomprehensible to us, must meet with the admiration of every tolerant and noble-minded man; and whilst fanaticism is abominable, self-sacrifice will always find an applauding audience and reap the respect of posterity. Had celibacy been a spontaneous vow made by every priest and member of the Church of Rome, we should, metaphorically speaking, doff our hats to them, but, alas! it was a measure dictated by the policy of Papacy—a measure which was bound to result in hypocrisy and deception. For how many, even of the higher clergy, were there who had really renounced physical love? And it cannot be doubted that the immoral lives of the unmarried Vicars of Christ exercised a most pernicious and injurious influence upon Christendom in general, and upon the lower clergy in particular. Again I must hasten to add that some shining examples of virtue and piety have occupied the throne of St. Peter, but they have been outnumbered by the debauchees and monsters who fill the annals of the history of Papacy.

. Courtesans, famous for their talent and their beauty, their intrigues, and their gallant love affairs, ruled the Church and disposed of the tiara. They raised and deposed the Pontiffs, imprisoned and assassinated them. They were in possession of the keys of the castle of St. Angelo, they exercised their sway over the aristocracy through their relations, over the people through their mild administration, and over the Popes—through their

vices. Their beds became the pedestals from which their lovers ascended the Pontifical throne.

"Alas!" exclaims Cardinal Baronius, "how ugly was the aspect of the Holy Roman Church! Those infamous prostitutes ruled Rome, and their creatures and lovers sat on the throne of St. Peter; and only for the sake of chronology one must mention these vile beings as Popes."

And Honorius, priest of Autun, expresses himself even more energetically: "Look," exclaims this author, "at the prelates and the cardinals of Rome, those worthy ministers surrounding the throne of the *Beast*. They are continually occupied in committing new iniquities and crimes. In all the churches of Rome the holy service is being abandoned, for priests soil their holy office by their impurity, and are deceiving the people by their hypocrisy. They deny the Creator by their works, and have become the scandal of nations. They are the blind who throw themselves into the precipice, obliging the simple folk to follow them.

"Look at these monks! They hide hypocrisy and iniquity beneath their cowls. Look at these cardinals, whose robes hide all the cardinal sins. Look at the convents of the nuns, places of debauchery. These abominable women have not chosen the Virgin, but Phryne and Messalina as their models! They prostrate themselves before the idol of Priapus, instead of the image of Christ. The reign of God is over and that of the anti-Christ has begun! There is neither morality, nor dogma,

nor cult, and the last days announced by the Apocalypse have come."

The reputation of the immoral lives of the Popes had become such that governments did not hesitate publicly to declare their indignation at their conduct. Such was the case when Pope Innocent IV was fleeing from the Emperor Frederick II, and intending to seek refuge at the Court of King Henry III of England. The House of Commons refused to offer hospitality to the Holy Father. "The purity of England," the Commons said, "has already been soiled by the usury and predatory commerce introduced by the Papal Legates; and now the Pope himself wishes to come into our midst and spend the wealth of the State and of the Church? This we shall not allow, for the Papal Court spreads such an abominable odour that it should not be admitted into England." And instead of going to England, His Holiness, Innocent IV, went to Lyons.

It is almost amusing, to use a mild expression, to find how the very apostles of celibacy among the Catholic clergy, the Popes and Cardinals who fought for it, were Don Juans themselves. One is quite accustomed to the jokes made at the expense of temperance preachers appearing on the public platform in a state of inebriety, but is it not equally ludicrous and disgusting to read of Popes and Cardinals who, whilst preaching of the superiority of abstinence and celibacy, were carrying on love affairs and intrigues. The following episode is characteristic. It is related, among others, by Theiner.



In 1125 Pope Honorius II sent the Cardinal Johann of Crema as nuncio to England, where His Eminence was endeavouring to introduce celibacy among the priests. In Westminster Abbey a council had taken place, and here the Papal Legate very sharply and severely criticised the ecclesiastics who would not renounce the love of woman! He was great in his noble denunciation, producing a very deep impression upon his hearers. A few days after this eloquent sermon, Cardinal Johann was found in the company of an English courtesan. But such was his impudence, that he did not even for a moment consider himself unworthy of continuing his campaign. From London the noble prelate went to Durham, where he exhorted the Bishop Ranulf, reproaching the latter for his immoral life. This successor of the Apostles was in the habit of being served at table by scantily dressed young maidens, whose allurements few of the guests at the episcopal board could withstand. The Cardinal severely reprimanded the Bishop for his mode of living. But Ranulf was neither a hypocrite nor a fool, and he decided to teach the Cardinal a lesson. He arranged a most opulent and luxurious banquet, to which the Cardinal was invited as the guest of honour. Ranulf's niece, a beautiful woman, not at all shy or savage, received the uncle's instructions to play the Delilah to the Cardinal. She found an only too yielding Samson, for the apostle of celibacy allowed her to accompany him to his private apartments. He was in her arms, when the door was suddenly

thrust open, and Bishop Ranulf, accompanied by his subordinates, carrying tapers in their hands, appeared. They surrounded the bed, chanting "benedicite, benedicite." The Bishop drank the health of His Eminence, to which the latter—who was a man of the world and not a savage anchorite—graciously replied.

Pius II had an illegitimate son—the issue of a love intrigue he had had at Strassburg with an English-woman—and this Papal boy he recommended to his father. "Does this cause you pain," continues the Pope, "because the boy is a child of sin? But surely, father, you do not imagine that you have brought into the world a son made of stone or of iron, considering that you yourself are flesh and blood. You know what a lover you have been yourself; and I am neither a eunuch nor even of a cold temperament. Besides, I am not a hypocrite who wishes to appear better than he is in reality. I freely confess my transgressions, for I am no better than King David and his son Solomon. Love is an old-established transgression, and none is free from it. The malady, if malady it is, is very much spread, and none can escape it."

But not only the Popes, the Cardinals and the members of the lower clergy have also been great Don Juans, and carried on love affairs, they have sacrificed upon the altars of Venus, and Bacchus, in spite of Christian dogma and doctrine.

Porphyrius, the Bishop of Antiochia, who lived in the fifth century, had many love affairs. He was

accused of the lowest and most pagan debauches, and is supposed to have sought his pleasure in the company of circus-riders, dancers, and other folks of the same stamp. His contemporary, Daniel, Bishop of Carres, in Mesopotamia, carried on a love intrigue with a married woman. Her name was Challosa; and so great was the prelate's love for her, that he did not hesitate to squander the wealth of the Church to satisfy the caprices of his favourite. Historians maintain that the lady had cost the Bishop not less than several hundreds of thousands of golden crowns. She left her husband, and openly lived with His Eminence, and it was an open secret that the Bishop had appointed Challosa sole heiress of all his estate. He also made her a present of the revenues of several estates belonging to the Church. His expenses being great, all means were welcome to him to make money, in order to enrich his many mistresses. He ordained deacons and priests, and gave absolution for the most heinous of crimes, as long as he was well paid for his work. Another of his contemporaries was Dioscorus II, patriarch of Alexandria, whose life was far from being one of patriarchal simplicity. This venerable father was such a *vert gallant*, that his conduct became a by-word and a common scandal. Married women, virgins, and common prostitutes, were in the habit of paying frequent visits to the patriarchal residence, and were granted admittance to the inner apartments of the Patriarch at all times and at all hours. The accusation which was raised against

Dioscorus states that even when His Eminence was in his bath the ladies had free access to him !\* He pretended, or at least his friends and later historians, endeavouring to whitewash the prelates of the early centuries of Christianity, maintain that Bishop Dioscorus was a saintly man ; and that if he was familiar with all those ladies, his sole and noble endeavour was to save their souls from perdition ! *Se non è vero è ben trovato*, for the whole town of Alexandria was aware that the famous courtesan Pansophia, surnamed " The Mountaineer," was the principal mistress of the Patriarch

From the letters of Pope Pelagius I we learn that several Bishops led scandalous lives. Two of them were accused before the Council of Lyons of an impure and licentious life. Their conduct was so scandalous that they were deposed and deprived of their respective bishoprics. They made a show of public repentance, mended their ways, and were reinstated in their posts. For some time they ostentatiously led most exemplary and pious lives in accordance with the precepts of the Church. They gave alms, fasted, prayed day and night, and continually recited the Psalms. But this life of devotion was only of short duration. Soon they fell back upon their former mode of living, passing the nights in revelries and orgies, and when the priests were singing the morning hymns in the adjoining church, the prelates were still at table, the walls of their residence were re-echoing with the songs of

\* Cf Fleury, " Ecclesiastical History, vol. xviii, 21

love and were witnessing scenes of debauchery and orgiastic revelry.

In the ninth century, during the reign of Emperor Theophilus, John Leconomante was Patriarch of Constantinople. He had been a great favourite with Emperor Michael the Stammerer, who had appointed him preceptor to his son Theophilus; the latter, on his accession to the throne, raised his teacher to the dignity of Patriarch. John was a great friend of the ladies; but, unlike some of his predecessors, who cared little whether their mistresses were handsome or ugly, this Greek ecclesiastic had a great sense of beauty, and picked out only the most beautiful women of Constantinople, whom he honoured with his love. His brother Anselm possessed a country residence not far from the town. This he kindly placed at the disposal of the Patriarch, and there the creatures and servants of His Eminence brought the most beautiful women of the town into a subterranean apartment, the entrance to which was hidden from the public eye. The prelate having inspected them, like that ancient Persian king in the book of Esther, retained only those who found favour in his eyes. The historian Fleury says, "*il faisait amener même des religieuses dont il abusait.*"

Let me now briefly sketch the love affairs and intrigues of the lower Catholic clergy, as far as I have been able to gather some information scattered in history. The councils of Mayence and of Nantes, held in the ninth century, accused the lower clergy

of incest, whilst one can get a glimpse of the life led by the Catholic priests in the tenth century from a pastoral letter written by a Bishop to some of his subordinates: "Many among you," writes this prelate, "are slaves to the vice of incontinence to such an extent that they are keeping concubines, with whom they eat together (*sic*) and live publicly. Those concubines rule your houses, and after your death they inherit the wealth which you have amassed in the service of the Church and from the alms of the faithful. . . . Their poverty," he continues, "makes many ecclesiastics pretend at first that they are pure and are leading a moral life, but once they have obtained a post, they keep and entertain their concubines at the expense of the poor. In order to satisfy the caprices of their mistresses and to support their bastards, the priests become avaricious, interested, usurers, liars, robbers, and thieves. . . . Avoid, therefore," he concludes, "not only crime, but everything that leads to crime, pay no attention to the beauty of woman, to their appearance and their sweet conversation; in a word, have nothing whatever to do with them."

In the same century the ecclesiastics of England are said to have been plunged in sin. They passed their time in orgies with loose women, in whose company they used to spend the money squeezed from the naïve, poor, faithful believers. The convents and the habitations of the priests were houses of ill-fame—dancing, singing, and revelry being carried on continually. The disorder was such that

King Edgar saw himself obliged to issue special laws and put a stop to the irregular life of the clergy.

"What shall I say of the clergy?" said the King of England in those days. "The pious souls weep over their crimes, whilst the impious are laughing. We find nothing among them but debauchery, excesses, orgies, and unchastity. Their abodes are propitious for solitude, and yet they dwell there not for pious meditations, but in order to lead lives of debauchery; night and day they drink and play and make merry. Thus they are squandering the money left to them from the legacies of kings and the alms given to them by princes."\*

Pope Benedict VIII openly complained at the Council of Pavia of the life led by the Italian clergy. "It is a shame, throwing dishonour upon the Church," he said, "to see how the ecclesiastics are squandering the gifts they have received from generous and liberal princes—employing these riches to keep their mistresses."

In Germany it was not better, as we learn from Peter Damian, who complained of this state of affairs to Pope Leo IX.

"Every one," wrote Damian, "knows the very names and the places of habitation of all the mistresses of the priests, gossip being busy in giving details of the presents and gifts presented to those ladies by their ecclesiastical lovers." Cardinal Baronius relates that the clergy of Lombardy opposed the election of Alexander II as Pope only

\* Cf. "*Antiromanus*," p. 432.

on account of the fact that he was a man of severe morals. "We require a man," they said, "who is not disinclined to carry on a love affair or two himself—and who will consequently show some indulgence towards others. Alexander is not that sort of man."

In spite of the orders of Gregory VII, who introduced the celibacy of the Catholic clergy, this state of affairs continued. And indeed it could scarcely have been expected of the priests to take the decree seriously, when it was rumoured that the Pope himself carried on love intrigues in his palace at Rome, and that the famous Countess Mathilda of Tuscany, all-powerful in Christendom, was supposed to be his mistress.

Gregory VII, anxious to increase the power of Papacy, had conceived the idea of introducing the law of celibacy. The measure was dictated, not by a high moral sentiment, but by ambition and thirst for wealth and power. And it is worthy of note that at the very moment when the Pontiff had decided to enjoin upon his priests the law of celibacy, a Turkish despot was introducing a similar law among his mamelukes. Two armies of bachelors had thus been formed, one in the Orient and the other in the Occident—one to defend the turban and the other the tiara. The mamelukes have disappeared, but the army of the tiara is still in existence.

Great was the indignation among the clergy at the Papal decree. Even those who by temperament



and ideas were inclined to a life of celibacy disapproved of it. Such decisions, they thought should be left to every individual to take for himself. Gregory naturally gave moral reasons, explaining his really political designs. "Woman, woman," exclaimed that vigorous Pontiff, "is the source of evil, the cause of perdition. She is leading to damnation. Woman is imperfection, and the priests should avoid every imperfection. Woman seduced man in the Garden of Eden, tempting him to partake of the apple from the tree of knowledge. Woman therefore, is the cause of the original sin; woman is the source of evil. The priests and servants of the Lord must therefore avoid woman, the sons of Adam flee from the daughters of Eve."

Gregory's aim was to isolate the priests from society, to turn them into a prætorian guard of the Pope. The Pontiff was to be a king, an emperor; he was to be above the sovereigns of the world, and as such he, too, must have his armies and his guards.

But he had a will of iron, this Vicegerent of the humble teacher of Nazareth, and he triumphed after all. What cared he for the corruption of the Church which his policy would be the inevitable result of his decree, as long as his political plans were realised? His arguments in favour of his decree were neither sincere nor moral. Ecclesiastical celibacy was only an *instrumentum regni* in his hands, a means by which he hoped to dominate more easily the clergy and to fashion the priests according to his wishes.

But if Gregory was severe against others, he does not appear to have been so against himself; the mask of authority and austerity which he had put on was made a means to hide his own irregular life. His own love affairs and intrigues were evidently well known to his contemporaries, for bold bishops did not hesitate to reproach the Holy Father for his iniquities.

"You are an heretic, Holy Father," wrote the French Bishops, "for you are teaching a morality which is insensate and contrary to the words of Christ." "You, oh sacrilegious Pontiff, whose debaucheries are well known, you wish to lead the members of the Church upon a *path* of perdition, by separating them from their legitimate wives."

It is abundantly clear that the results of the law of celibacy showed themselves in grave disorders and a very licentious life among the clergy. This is not only attested by opponents and critics of the Catholic Church, by Protestants, and reformers, but even by pious and staunch defenders of Rome, to whom the dignity of the faith was dear, such as Peter Damian, in his famous work "*Gomorra*."

St. Bernard, too, with a little more decency, relates similar details of the amours of clergy and prelates, which led to such debaucheries that the honour of women was not safe. How far-reaching the consequences of the amours of the priests were, the following fact will testify. A century had scarcely elapsed since the law of celibacy had been passed, when the Scandinavians revolted against

Waldemar I, King of Denmark (1179). One of their principal griefs was his refusal to abolish the law of celibacy of the priests. It must not, however, be imagined that the Scandinavians were fighting the battle of their priests. Theirs was a more selfish motive. One of the consequences of the law of ecclesiastical celibacy was the state of general immorality and the corruption of the purity of the women; it was for the honour of their wives and daughters that the Scandinavians were fighting; and it was in order to safeguard the purity and chastity of their women that France and Switzerland passed bylaws by which the priests were allowed to keep mistresses. A passage from the famous work of Nicholas Clemangis, who severely criticised the corruption, not only of the priests, but also of the nuns, will give some idea of the state of affairs and of the relationship of the monks and nuns in his time.

"The monasteries," he writes, "are no longer sanctuaries devoted to the divinity, but places of abomination and debauchery—*rendezvous* of young libertines who are only anxious to gratify their libidinous desires. Indeed, to make a girl take the veil is equivalent with forcing her to prostitution."\*

Rathier, Bishop of Verona, relates that in his days many of his colleagues were living with concubines. The best proof of the amorous lives of the Italian clergy, in the ninth and tenth centuries, may be found in the eloquent defence of those who thought

\* Cf. "De Corrupte Ecclesie Statu," chap. xv.

such a mode of life permissible. We find, on the other hand, that the pious Bishop of Verona waged a war against such abuses, continually attacking and severely criticising the *mulierositas*, as he called it, of his colleagues.

The following episode is exceedingly interesting, for it sheds a glaring light upon the trend of thought and the morality of the century. Bishop Tedald of Arezzo was declining in health, and some people had recommended to him, "on account of a certain weakness," the biblical remedy of the Shunamite. The ecclesiastic summoned a lady of easy virtue, but, at the same time, he put a burning torch near his couch, and when the flames reached it, he exclaimed under tears, "Alas ! if I cannot stand this little flame, how shall I be able to suffer the flames of hell ? " And the Shunamite was sent away.

Quite different, however, was the behaviour of the majority of the prelates of the Church, who, like modern clubmen or Oriental potentates, considered it a matter of ambition to boast of the charms of a beautiful concubine ; and it used to be a matter of great pride for an ecclesiastic to possess a mistress more beautiful than those of his colleagues.

The love affairs and intrigues of the Italian clergy had become such a matter of course that whenever a bishop or a prelate formed an exception the Romans looked upon him as an angel. In Lombardy, in Milan, Turin, and in other parts of Italy, the same state of affairs prevailed. Bishop Regimbald of Fiesole was notorious for his licentious life, whilst the

monks of Farfa secretly kept woman. The archbishops, who were anxious to eradicate such abuses, were absolutely powerless, and their endeavours proved futile—if not fraught with danger for themselves. Thus, when Nicholas II, Bishop of Brescia, issued severe laws against the amorous sins of the priests and ecclesiastics, the latter nearly killed him. Priests openly mocked the commands of their superiors; and a priest of the chapter of St. Cæcilia in Rome refused to obey the command of Pope Stephen IX to abandon his mistress, declaring all the resolutions in this respect futile and stupid. Moreover, the sons and relatives of the priests formed a power in Rome and Milan and had to be counted with. It must also be pointed out that the majority of these priests, bishops, prelates, and other dignitaries of the Church were not living with one woman in a marital state, but had many mistresses. They were, to use an expression of the period, *multinubi*.

The tenth century in Italy was a century of woman, even to a much greater extent than was the eighteenth century of Louis XV in France and in Europe. The Papal mistresses, Theodora and Marozia, were members of a family of courtesans who looked upon their courtesanship as upon an hereditary privilege. The women of that house were the mistresses of most of the rulers of Italy and extended their sway over Christendom and Papacy. King Hugo, who dishonoured the bride of his own son, surrounded himself with a regular harem; but among his favourites there were three

whom he especially preferred. The number of their illegitimate children was legion, but as these ladies were not exactly models of fidelity, and—apart from their royal lovers—had also their *amants de cœur*, one could never be quite sure as to who the fathers of these children were. It was natural that such a state of affairs exercised its influence upon the Church and upon the clergy of Italy. A critic of the life of the clergy says that Dionysius, Bishop of Piacenza, and Gregory of Vercelli, were much more capable of judging female beauty and charm than of expressing an opinion and showing some insight at a Papal election. And Bishop Reginbald of Fiesole had surrounded himself with a whole harem of ladies of an amiable nature and easy virtue, whilst Bishop Alberich of Marsika had only one mistress. Fearing the punishment at the hands of Emperor Otho III, the latter had sent his favourite to the convent, and made her a nun—temporarily, during the visit of the Emperor, but as soon as Otho had left the Italian soil, the episcopal favourite threw off the coarse garb of the nun, and returned to the life of “the flesh and the devil,” and to the arms of her ecclesiastical lover! In Florence the prelates led a life of debauchery, spending and squandering, in company of their mistresses, the wealth of the Church. And the ladies of easy virtue—or, to speak bluntly, the courtesans of Italy of the tenth century—were not different as regards lucre and venality from the courtesans of modern Europe. They despised the priests as long as they were poor,

but as soon as the latter had accumulated some wealth, they threw themselves into their arms, pretending that they could no longer resist them. The result was that for the sake of the love of woman, priests unhesitatingly robbed the Church, squeezing money from stupid and confiding pious Catholics, which they afterwards spent upon shameless women, trafficking in their charms. *Tout comme chez nous!*

The French Bishops were naturally not better than their Italian *confrères*. Frenchmen as a rule imagine that they are privileged by nature to occupy the first place and play first fiddle in the concert of *Eros*. Hughes, Archbishop of Rouen, who lived in the tenth century, was a great sinner and a lovelace. He had a number of favourites and many children.

One author also speaks of the life led by the nuns in several of their convents.

Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, a man of severe morals, and leading a pure life, accused the nuns of immoral conduct. One cannot help quoting the words uttered by the famous Dominican monk, Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro, at the Council of Lyons. The Council had taken place in 1245, and the Cardinal was delivering the farewell speech. "Friends," he exclaimed, "we have been able to bestow a great benefit upon this town. When we, the fathers of the Council, arrived here, Lyons had three houses of ill-fame, but now at our departure we leave only one. But this one reaches from one end of the town to the other." Another Dominican

monk, Robert Holcot, professor of Theology at Oxford, compares the ecclesiastics of his day to fauns and satyrs. And if one considers the state of ignorance of mediævalism, it will be comprehensible that these ecclesiastic Don Juans found only too willing ears among the ladies and the *belles* of their day. Priests preached and taught doctrines suitable for themselves. Thus, the Don Juans persuaded innocent and ignorant women of the fourteenth century that during the absence of the husband it was permissible to love an ecclesiastic, who could easily absolve them, not only of this, but also of other sins. And the ignorant women accepted the alluring doctrine of loving without sinning.

Priests also often eloped with nuns. A priest, named Aspulus, carried off in the middle of the night a beautiful nun, Gumperga by name, from the convent of St. Peter at Lucchesa. He "put her on horseback, kissed her, gave her two soldi, and carried her off," says the mediæval chronicler. The monks of Farfa led a life full of orgies, and especially when Campo became their abbot, the walls of the monastery witnessed scenes of debauchery equalling only those of Capri in the days of Tiberius. The concubines and prostitutes were mistresses of the wealth of the monasteries and convents.

Anselm of Bisate speaks of the life of the priests, maintaining that the churches and chapels served as places of rendezvous for the love affairs of the priests and the bishops. The nuns, he says, were not more abstinent than the monks. Widows took the veil in



order to be free ! and not be bound to one man. " Instead of being the wife of one man," says a contemporary author, " the nun could be the mistress of several men." This scandalous life of the nuns became so notorious that special laws had to be issued by the Carlovingians as well as by the Church.

As a result of such a life led by the clergy, the ecclesiastical power became hereditary in certain families, for the sons of the clergy considered it as their privilege to occupy the posts of their fathers ; and in Verona, Arezzo, and Fiesole, priestly dynasties were practically ruling. The family of the Bishop Regimbald left the church to his nephew and to the latter's descendants. " It would only be in punishment for his sins," he said, " if ever his race died out." On the other hand, the wealth of the Church was being squandered, for the clerical concubines were very exacting and extravagant. And whilst the women of the Old Testament had brought their ear-rings and their trinkets and ornaments to Aaron the priest, so that he might melt them and mould a god for them to worship, the monks of Farfa were forced to turn the holy vessels of gold and silver and the altar-covers into ornaments for their favourites ! Verily, woman varies with the centuries. Clergymen were bound to develop a sense of rapacity and to accumulate wealth so as to satisfy the caprices of their ladies. One often reads nowadays—especially in France—of some crime committed, of a forgery, or of a daring theft and rob-

bery perpetrated by an otherwise honest man, led down the slippery path of crime by an extravagant and exacting mistress ! Many are the poor deluded Adams who are not only losing their Edens, but who are also being sent to penal servitude because they cannot resist the tempting smile of serpentine Eve—indulging in luxurious tastes ! If the lover has money he squanders it ; and if he has not he often steals and robs. It is an old story, as old as the hills. Eternally the biblical episode is repeated throughout the centuries. Eve tempting Adam, weak and yielding ; the sweet fruit is tasted ; the dessert is partaken of ; Eden is lost ; man is sent to till the ground or to work in quarries and mines, whilst woman remains behind to tempt other men and to make them commit new crimes ! The priests of mediævalism stole, stole and robbed the Church to satisfy the caprices of their favourites and their concubines !

Before the Council of Reims several archbishops and bishops were accused of entertaining gallant intrigues with married women, and of abducting all those who found favour in their eyes.

Cardinal Baronius relates the following episode, in which Guy, the Archbishop of Milan, figures as the guilty one. This prelate had many favourites, among others his own niece. But not all the members of his clergy were as corrupt as their superior. Arialde, a deacon of Guy's church, did not hesitate to reproach the Archbishop with his ignominious life. Tired at last of the remonstrances of his

inferior, the Archbishop accused him of treason and had him arrested. His niece—who hated the preaching priest—wrought a terrible vengeance upon the poor deacon. With the assistance of two clergymen, she mutilated the body of the chaste preacher in a manner worthy of a Messalina ! For this lady, living in the episcopal palace, was not only the mistress *en titre* of her uncle, but she carried on *liaisons* with all the young prelates coming under the supervision of her uncle.

The love affairs of the bishops of the twelfth century were so many that Richard I, king of England, could rightly exclaim : " They say that I have a bad daughter, impurity—and I am advised to marry her off. Well then, I shall marry her, and give her unto the prelates of the Church, the bishops ! "

In a Bull addressed to the bishops by Pope Alexander IV, this Pontiff exhorts them to lead an exemplary life, and to abandon their mistresses. And the Bishop of Liège, Henry de Gueldres, was such a lovelace that Pope Gregory X was obliged to address to him a severe letter of reprimand. " We know," wrote the Pontiff, " that you have carried on several love intrigues before and after your promotion to the episcopate. You have taken an abbess of the Holy Order of St. Benedict as your mistress and have lived with her publicly. Nay, you have carried your impudence so far as to boast during a banquet that you have had fourteen children in twenty-two months ! It is known that you are keeping a nun and several other women in one of

the houses belonging to you—a property known as ‘Le Parc,’ and whenever you frequent this house you leave your followers behind, entering the place alone. The abbess of a monastery in your diocese having died, you have promoted the daughter of a certain Count to this high and saintly office; and this young abbess is your mistress! She has even born a child unto you!”

Giovanni Villani, in his famous “Chronicle,” relates the following episode. A wit of the fourteenth century, well acquainted with the love affairs of the clergy of his age, circulated an anonymous letter purported to have been written by the devil and dated from the Inferno in presence of many demons. In this sarcastic epistle his Satanic Majesty expresses his satisfaction with the conduct of the prelates, complimenting them upon the numerous love affairs they are carrying on, for Impurity is triumphing, thanks to their efforts.

Poggio Bracciolini, too, relates many stories of ecclesiastical love intrigues and the manner in which these Don Juans triumphed over the virtues of the faithful Christian women. A curate in Brescia informed his lady parishioners that it was their sacred duty to pay him the tithe not only of their worldly possessions, but also of their conjugal duties.

Another story—characteristic of the impudence of the clergy in those days and of the superstitious ignorance of mediævalism—is related by the same author. A Franciscan monk was the successful lover of a married lady. One day, when he was

husily engaged—so he afterwards pretended—in listening to the confession of the lady, the husband suddenly arrived. The devotions were disturbed. Don Juan in the Franciscan garb escaped through a window, but was obliged, in his hurry, to leave his trousers behind. The infuriated husband—Italians were jealous even in the Middle Ages—rushed to the monastery, and, brandishing the clerical undergarment, complained to the Prior. The latter, however, shaking his head, mildly rebuked the offended husband. "My son," he said unctuously, "may Heaven forgive you for the sin you are committing." The poor man looked nonplussed. "I am committing a sin!" he stammered, "but, Father, methought I have been sinned against, rather than sinning." "Yes, my son, you are sinning, for you are calumniating a holy man, the pious brother who has just left your house, where he has been praying for the recovery of your dear spouse, who is not well." The husband looked sheepish. He glanced from the Prior to the trousers and from the trousers to the Prior, and at last ventured to query: "And these, my Father?" "These," replied the unperturbed ecclesiastic, "are the garments of the holy St. Francis of Assisi; it is a precious relic, by means of which the pious brother intended to cure your wife's illness." And casting a glance of mild reproach at the ungrateful husband, he continued: "In solemn procession the costly relic will be carried through the town."

Coming down to modern times, the episodes of the

intrigues of the Catholic clergy become historical and precise. Thus, in that century of gallantry, of love, and-debauchery, the century of women, I mean the seventeenth century, the Vicar of St. Eustache in Paris was carrying on a criminal love intrigue with a married woman, the wife of the Comte d'Olonne. One day the Comte fell dangerously ill, and as a good Catholic he expressed the wish to confess his sins. His wife called in her lover, the Vicar, to listen to the confession of her husband. The latter who had evidently been *au courant* of the *liaison* of his wife, but had considered it *bon ton* to feign ignorance, lost his temper in the last moment. "What!" he exclaimed, "will my honour not be safe even on my death-bed?"

Later on the son of the Thuringian peasant declared war to the Vicar of Christ; he introduced the great reform of the Church of Rome. In order to re-establish the purity of morals of the priests, Luther allowed them legitimate marriage. The Protestant ecclesiastics now openly married, following the example of their leader. But those who remained faithful to Rome, considering Luther's permission of marriage an abomination, did nevertheless persist in their lives of debauchery and licentiousness; through centuries they continued to carry on love affairs with married women and virgins. Many Catholic clergymen were honest enough to abandon the Catholic faith of Rome rather than continue lives of hypocrisy. Thus, with

the rise of Protestantism an atmosphere of purity was wafted through Europe.

The love of several bishops of the sixteenth century for their mistresses made them abjure Catholicism and embrace Protestantism. Such were Nicholas de Lorraine, Bishop of Mayence, who loved Marguerite d'Egmont,\* Jean-Antoine Caraccioli, Bishop of Troyes in Champagne, and Odet de Coligny, Cardinal and Bishop of Beauvais. It was the latter's love for the beautiful Elizabeth de Hauteville de Lore which made him turn Protestant.

Another example of the influence which the power of love exercised in religious belief is the story of Jacques Spifame, Bishop of Nevers. He loved his mistress too well, and sooner than separate from her became a Protestant. The name of the lady was Catherine de Gasperme. She was the wife of Etienne de Cresle, a *procureur* at the *Châtelet* in Paris. But the prelate possessed more attraction for the beautiful lady than her lawyer husband—and—she bore two children which could claim the Cardinal as their father. In 1539, the husband having died, the widow and her lover lived openly together. But the *Parlement of Paris* was informed of the prelate's irregular conduct, and ordered his arrest. Spifame escaped—and in company of his mistresses left France for Geneva. Here he turned Protestant and married Catherine with the permission of the Consistory.†

\* Stenden, "Hist Lit.," p. 21.

† Cf Spon, "Hist de Genève"

This case, however, does not yet exhaust the list of Catholic prelates who turned Protestants for the sake of a woman and her love. Thus, Gebhard Truchsess, Archbishop of Cologne in the sixteenth century, fell in love with a beautiful nun, Agnes de Mansfeld. The Archbishop, who had every facility to see and speak to the *religieuse*, availed himself of his opportunity to disclose his love to the woman who had left the world. He conjured her to return to the life of love, and she readily consented. For some time the Archbishop kept his mistress in the episcopal palace of Broel, beyond the Rhine, near Cologne, and afterwards in the castle of Koisuverd. At last, however, the prelate grew tired of the continual secrecy he was compelled to observe. He turned Protestant and openly married his mistress.\*

It was also in the sixteenth century that Emperor Ferdinand had sent André Dudidth, Bishop of Tina in Hungary, as Ambassador to the Court of Sigismundus Augustus, king of Poland. Here the prelate saw a beautiful girl, Sophia Genesilla, with whom he fell passionately in love. In Trent, where he went to the famous Council, André eloquently advocated the abolition of celibacy of the Catholic clergy. His efforts, however, remained futile. His love was evidently being returned by the girl; for when he had failed to convince his colleagues, André Dudidth broke all the obstacles standing between him and happiness, abdicated his bishopric, turned Protestant, and married Sophia.

\* Fleury, *l. cit.*



Less noble was the conduct of Montluc, Bishop of Valence, a Dominican monk who had gained the favour of the Queen of Navarre, sister of François I, who brought him to Court. François I and Henri II entrusted the Dominican with many delicate political missions, which the priest accomplished to the entire satisfaction of his sovereigns. In Ireland, Poland, Italy, England, Scotland, Germany, and even Constantinople, he had represented the interests of France, and he was appointed Bishop of Valence for his many services. Jean de Montluc fell in love with a young girl, who returned his passion. Being, however, a good Catholic, she was seized from time to time with a feeling of repentance, fearing the punishment of Heaven for her cardinal sins. In order to appease the scruples of his mistress, Montluc married her secretly. The Bishop does not seem, however, to have remained faithful to his wife. Indeed, his love intrigues were many. He carried them on wherever he went as ambassador of the Court of France. In Ireland he is said to have seduced the daughter of a noble lord, in whose house he was staying as an honoured guest, whilst in England he kept a courtesan whom he was in the habit of visiting.\* His love intrigues as well as his clandestine marriage at last became an open secret, and in order to escape the thunder of Rome, the Bishop of Valence threw off his mask and turned Protestant.

François de Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, in the

\* Bossuet, "*Hist. des Variat.*" liv. 7, No. 7

## CHAPTER II

### THE RULE OF WOMEN: THE PONTIFFS OF THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

IN the following chapter I shall relate the love affairs of some of the Popes of early mediævalism. During the first half of the tenth century, rich in gallant intrigues, not less than thirteen Popes successively occupied the throne of St. Peter. And what do the historians relate of these men? Scarcely any deed worth mentioning, except their *lives* of debauchery. Like the pagan Emperors, and some modern sovereigns, the representatives of Christ were in constant fear of the assassin lurking in a corner of their residence. Palace revolutions were the order of the day. If a Pope was in the way, his mistress soon found a willing priest to dispatch His Holiness, and in remuneration for his foul deed she bestowed upon the murderer the tiara, and—*her love!*

Many were the Popes who died an unnatural, violent death. They were throttled or assassinated; and the way to the throne of St. Peter was covered with blood and strewn with victims. So great were the abominations of the Pontiffs in those days that

even the defenders of Papacy and the impartial historians of the Church cannot stem the wave of moral indignation which the facts must arouse in our minds. "In those days," writes Baronius, "one could witness the devastation of the temple of God and the sanctuary of the Lord, and upon the throne of St. Peter there sat impious men, not Popes, but monsters."

How ugly was the aspect of the Church when courtesans, shameless and dissolute women, reigned in Rome, placing their lovers upon the Papal throne! The clergy were never asked their opinion as to the election of the Chief of Christendom. Papal decrees were destroyed, the ancient apostolic traditions were laughed at, and the sacred customs and old ceremonies, employed at the election and coronation of the Pontiffs, absolutely ignored. "But although the Church was without a Pope she was not without a head, a spiritual one, for Christ never abandoned her"

"Theodora, an impudent courtesan," writes Luitprand, "dominated and ruled over Rome with a masculine and monarchic authority." This woman and her two daughters, Marozia and Theodora II, who equalled and even surpassed their mother in corruption and debauchery, were the real sovereigns of the Church. These women ruled over Rome—as other favourites will rule centuries later over European kingdoms and vast empires. The peculiar state of Italy in those days perhaps even facilitated for those ambitious women the task of

becoming mistresses of Italy, of Rome, and of Christendom. Rome was an oligarchic and theocratic Republic, constituted somewhat similarly to the Republics of Venice and Amalfi.

Nominally the sovereignty was vested in the people, but in reality it had passed into the hands of a few nobles, who, having appropriated all the power, disposed of the dignity of Pope and of that of Duke in the other cities. And as the majority of those powerful nobles occupied ecclesiastical positions, they formed irregular, instead of legitimate alliances; and thus the way into the Church was opened to that class of women who are particularly fond of, and apt for, a *liaison*. Like the ancient Aspasias, the Roman ladies of the tenth century triumphed by means of feminine beauty and *finesse* over masculine barbarism and grossness. It must not be forgotten that it was the iron age of feudalism, when brutal force and murderous fury were the only divinities whom the barbarian conqueror was compelled to respect. But ironclad men, steeped in ignorance and in superstition, were enchained by the frail bonds of love. Lombards and Huns, Franks and Ostrogoths, the new conquerors of Italy, the savage giants issuing from the deep Teutonic forests and invading the classic soil of Rome, became so many Herculeses, sitting at the feet of Omphale. For the Roman ladies, the daughters of the Latin race—with their intelligence, their *esprit* and their vigorous passions, easily made themselves mistresses of, and triumphed over, the

They have been called—and not without some good reason—the “heroines of political love,” for by offering their love to the foreign conquerors they had succeeded in subduing them—Delilah-like, lulling Samson to sleep. They dominated and absorbed the invaders, giving birth to a new race of Italians, who soon put a stop to the foreign despotism by constituting and raising on its ruins the Italian city and the republics of later mediævalism. And whilst empires are crumbling down, and all the elements of social life are being dissolved ; whilst the roaring and rushing waves of invading immigration are drowning the structure raised by the Cæsars, savage conquerors, ironclad from head to foot, obey the magic wand raised by the fair bands of the Roman courtesans. But just as the man of early mediævalism was subjugated, hypnotised by the dazzling Italian beauties, who captivated his senses, so two centuries later the incendiaries, murderers, iconoclasts of to-day will under-go the civilising influence of the Platonic beauty of woman. In an age of *troubadours* and of knighterrants—they will kneel down before the weaker sex of creation, willingly acknowledge its ascendancy, worship and adore where they were supposed to rule and command.

Italy in those days was in the throes of a complete anarchy. The successors of Charlemagne were unable either to wield his heavy sword or to guard his many conquests ; and the despotism of the new conqueror was broken just as the despotism of the

teries, to the jurisdiction of bishops and nobles. The right of murdering and violating could be bought. Force sanctioned right, and the weaker were constantly being crushed between the two mediæval powers, the nobles and the clergy. Their very lives had become a curse and a real *Inferno*. War was being waged in the East and in the West, between nations and classes—whose varied interests were continually clashing, various tribes and hordes were constantly threatening and invading Italy, and were only with difficulty repulsed by the disunited chiefs, at war among themselves, each proclaiming himself a descendant of Charlemagne. Threatened and menaced from all sides, Italy was the arena of internal wars between the dukes of Friuli and Spoleto, who reigned concurrently, each assuming the title of King of the Peninsula.

In the midst of those factions and invasions, which were crushing the country, a few cities only retained their relative independence, their autonomy, their magistrates and liberty of the citizen. They were soon turned into republics, such as Amalfi, Naples, Venice, and Rome. Rome especially had become a sort of free city in the midst of Italy enslaved, except Venice and the Greek republics in Campania. The Eternal City had retained the republican government with the dignities and offices of Consul and Senate and the turbulent oligarchy of nobles and priests. The head of Christendom was nominally being elected by universal suffrage, but in reality the Bishop of

Rome was appointed by the faction of nobility and clergy in power. Clergy and nobility, two mighty orders, two powerful parties, ecclesiastical and military, were usually at variance about the election of a Pope—their constant aim being to elect or to depose a Pontiff. On the one hand the Roman nobility—and especially the Counts of Tusculum—represented the national party, always endeavouring to have a Roman Pope, who would be inaccessible to the influence of a king of France, an emperor of Germany, or even a king of Italy. On the other hand, the clergy were striving to make the Roman nobility subservient to the bishops and the foreign sovereigns. And each party wanted its own Pope. The election of a Pontiff was an important matter, for the successor of St. Peter united in his person the functions of head of Christendom, of political chief, and of feudal ruler of Rome.

Moreover, since the Holy See had ceased to be merely a spiritual power, that is to say had large revenues, vassals, and serfs, the barons had envied its power and the gold now to be found near the tomb of St. Peter. Soon they began to fight for the tiara. It was like a subfee of the county of Tusculum. Loose women trafficked in it: Theodora and Marozia gave it to their sons, to their lovers. Eight Popes were named by them. What Popes!

Among the many barons and nobles the Counts of Tusculum were the mightiest in Rome, and it was through their help that Theodora and her daughters gained their influence over the Eternal City and the Popes.

Theodora was distinguished not only by her extraordinary beauty, but also by a remarkable intelligence, coupled with a boundless ambition and a never to be daunted courage. She was of the race of women who come into the world to rule—of the race of a Semiramis, a Catherine II, an Elizabeth or a Pompadour. Never in the history of the Courts of Europe and in the annals of the powerful favourites who have ruled over sovereigns and nations—favourites who were Prime Ministers in petticoats—did any woman attain to higher power and greater influence than this Roman courtesan and her two daughters. For she was a courtesan this Theodora, and her licentiousness was as great as were her courage and her ambition. And yet—she was not a common woman, risen from the gutter. She was a noble lady, the wife of a Consul and a Senator, Theopbylactus by name, for she called herself *Senatrix*. Her father's name was Glycerius, but little else is known about him. The authority and influence wielded by Theodora and her family must have been immense, to judge from contemporary chronicles.

The Counts of Tusculum and their relatives the Counts of Tuscany and the Dukes of Spoleto, had acquired great power over Italy. Theodora the elder, and her daughters Marozia and Theodora the younger, thanks to their beauty, their keen wits and their unscrupulousness, stimulated also by their boundless ambition, had gained sway over the Counts of Tusculum and Tuscany, and through them over the Papal throne.



“Thus,” writes Baronius, “this woman could rule Rome. . . Prostituting her daughters to Pontiffs and nobles, she disposed of the Papal throne, raising upon the holy seat criminals and pseudo Popes.”

These women distributed their favours among barons and bishops, abandoned their bodies to the mighty potentates, who in their turn became pliable in the hands of the astute enchantresses ; for, charming slaves of an hour of abandonment, they soon rose as commanding queens from the voluptuous couch ; in remuneration for their caresses they obtained a castle, or the disposal of an army, an election or a treaty. Marozia had been the wife of Alberic, Count of Tusculum, and after his death had married Guido, margrave of Tuscia. This woman was also the mistress of Pope Sergius III, who was a son of Count Benedict of Tusculum. Marozia was only fourteen when Sergius became her lover. Through the influence of the mother of his mistress over the Counts of Tuscany, Sergius was elevated to the Papal throne, as Pope Sergius III.

In St. Angelo the Pope was leading a life of debauchery and excess, whilst his mistress and her mother ruled Rome and Christendom. The walls of St. Angelo resounded from the wild orgies which remind one of the times of pagan Emperors, rather than of the Pontiffs of Rome. The lover of Marozia reigned only seven years, for he was suddenly carried off by a premature death in 918. Marozia—another Messalina—received the news of the demise of the

Holy Father with relative calm. The number of handsome priests was not yet exhausted, and the ingenious woman employed the practice which was followed several centuries later by an Empress on the throne of Holy Russia. I refer to Catherine II.

In a luxurious apartment in the Lateran, which Sergius III had had reconstructed, Marozia was giving an audience to the young priests, among whom she had decided to choose a lover. Arrangements were being made for the funeral of the Holy Father, and the mighty favourite consulted the high dignitaries of the Church, discussing the details of the procession. In reality, however, she was listening absent-mindedly—for her practised eye was examining the appearance and scrutinising the traits of the priests before her. Already she had dismissed several, who had evidently not had the good fortune of kindling any passion in the breast of the licentious lady, when a young and handsome priest was introduced into her presence. She threw a passionate glance at him, her whole being vibrated, her heart was aflame.

"Who are you? What is your name? Which is the rank you occupy in the Holy Church?" she hastily inquired.

"Madam," he timidly replied, "my name is Anastasius, and I am but a simple priest who served His Holiness Sergius, the Bishop of Rome, and the Count of Tuscany. His Holiness was very kind unto me, and his death is a punishment by which Heaven has visited us, his faithful servants."

"Let the dead alone," replied Marozia, "and let us think of the living, we who are alive. And so your name is Anastasius! There have been Popes of the name of Anastasius," she added significantly—casting the handsome ecclesiastic a glance which he could not mistake. A thrill of joy swelled the heart of the ambitious priest and a wave of passion swept through his frame. He saw, as in a dream, power and love in his grasp—it he only dared to grasp them—and he *did* dare. Throwing himself at the feet of the powerful woman, who at that moment ruled Rome, he avowed his passionate love for her. From far he had been worshipping her, not daring to lift his eyes to the mistress of his superior, of His Holiness; but now she was free, he could restrain himself no longer—and if she could not return his love he would sooner exile himself from the Eternal City and retire to Palestine to lead a life of an anchorite than bear the agony of seeing her daily—inaccessible to him!

The mighty Marozia, who in her heart had already given the place occupied by Sergius to the young and ardent priest, listened to his passionate declaration with a feeling of rapture. She spoke gentle words of hope and encouragement; and her promises must have been very pleasant, for Anastasius left her apartment, joy expressed on his countenance. Like Catherine II, eight centuries later, Marozia would not love a man of low rank; she was vain in her love. Anastasius should be Pope, and worthy of the love of one of the most

beautiful women of Italy. Historians relate that Marozia shared the love of the handsome priest with her sister Theodora the younger. For three years the Holy Father Anastasius II the lover of the two amiable sisters Marozia and Theodora sat on the Papal throne. When he died Laudo of Sabium a favourite of Theodora the elder the mother of the two charming daughters was appointed successor and Pontiff of Rome. His whole merit consisted in the fact of his being a lover of Theodora. But he who builds upon woman's constancy and favour builds upon quicksand. The mistress had only to cast her eyes upon some one else and her lover was dismissed losing not only his lady's love but also the Papal throne. Thus it happened that in those days Peter the Archbishop of Ravenna used to send his *diaconus* a certain John to Rome on ecclesiastical business. When Laudo was elected Pope Deacon John came to congratulate His Holiness in the name of the Archbishop.

He was a handsome man this deacon and had the good fortune of arousing the passion of Theodora the elder. She preferred him to Laudo. And as this Messalina was not a woman to be thwarted in her desires John became her lover. The Archbishop of Ravenna having suddenly died the Pope had to appoint the favoured deacon to fill his vacancy—and thus to Ravenna which he had left as simple deacon. John returned as archbishop.

But Theodora did not relish the separation from her new lover. Nor did she care to leave Rome for Ravenna. The simplest way out of her dilemma was therefore to raise the lucky Archbishop upon the throne of St. Peter. Six months and ten days Laudo had worn the tiara, when the all-powerful courtesan found that His Holiness stood in the way of her passions—and His Holiness had to disappear from the stage. Laudo dead, it was easy for Theodora the elder to use her influence in favour of John, who actually ascended the Papal throne under the name of John X.

The truth compels one to admit that Theodora's taste deserves some admiration in this instance. Pope John X, if not quite fit for the tiara, was a powerful personality and would have made a fine ruler in those days of trouble and party strifes. He held the keys of St. Peter, but under his clerical garb there dwelt the heart of a soldier, and few adventurous knights of his day could so well wield the sword against the enemy as he whose mission it was to preach the Gospel of Love! He proved his martial valour on more than one occasion. The Saracens, who since 876 had been occupying a fortress on the Garigliano, not far from Rome, were making frequent invasions into the Roman territory preventing the pious pilgrims from visiting the graves of the Apostles. Pope John, at the head of an army, delivered the Eternal City from this constantly threatening danger. Aided by the Duke Beringar of Friuli, one of the mightiest princes

in Italy, His Holiness stormed the fortress of the Saracens. The latter then fought their way through the lines of the Christian army, but were overwhelmed by the superior numbers and taken prisoners. Many perished and the Pope himself killed a number with his own hands. History relates that after the battle of Carpentras Henry IV had carried the banners captured on the battlefield and laid them down at the feet of his mistress, Consande. It was a gallant feat on the part of the *roi vert galant*, but he was not the first in history who could boast of such an act of gallantry. The Pope-soldier, John X, after the victory on the Garigliano returned in triumph to Rome, and *le c*, laying the trophies of victory at the feet of his mistress, he threw himself into her arms.

Fourteen years John X remained in undisturbed possession of the keys of St. Peter, sharing his power with the woman who had raised him to the Papal dignity. But his hour of doom was approaching. In the dark corners of the Lateran the assassin was already lurking, waiting to strike the deadly blow. Theodora's daughter Marozia had her own lovers and cared little for those of her mother. It was a rivalry between mother and daughter, both actuated by the strongest passions let loose in the human heart. Yet Marozia was evidently not quite devoid of filial affection and respect, as long as her mother was alive she dared not cross her wish and John X remained on the Papal throne. But things changed when the elder Theodora died.

Marozia, whilst being the mistress of Pope Sergius III, had also at the same time carried on a *liaison* with the Margrave Count Adalbert of Tuscany. This fact, however, did not prevent Guido, an elder son of Adalbert, who was anxious to strengthen his influence in the city of Rome, from marrying Marozia. And as soon as Theodora the elder was dead and Marozia saw that Pope John X had no confidence in her, she and her consort resolved to remove His Holiness from his post and to dispose of the apostolic throne in their own interests. In the silence of the night Guilo gathered his retainers and followers, penetrated into St. Angelo, killed all those who offered resistance, among them the brother of the Pope, and made the latter himself prisoner, in spite of his brave defence. John X was thrown into a dungeon, where priests, who did the bidding of the Messalina of Christian Rome, suffocated the warrior Pope with pillows.

Again the throne of St. Peter was vacant, and again Marozia appointed her lovers to be the Vicars of Christ. And so powerful was her influence that Rome and Christianity obeyed her orders, accepting the creatures of her choice. As long as those priests were favoured by the capricious dame they remained in possession of the keys of heaven, but woe unto those lovers of whom Marozia grew tired. Thus Leo VI, and after him Etienne VII, were for a short time the lovers of Marozia and the tools in her hands. She quickly grew tired of them, and sent them from the apostolic throne to early graves.

Growing older and wiser, Marozia felt a sudden maternal affection well up in her breast. She remembered the lover of her youth, Pope Sergius III, and the child she had borne unto him. The boy was now twenty, and the ambitious mother, suddenly remembering the son, made up her mind to invest him with the Pontifical dignity. And whilst the son, under the name of John XI, sat on the Papal throne, the mother ruled in his name, allowing the Pope boy to indulge in all kinds of pleasures and dissipations.

Marozia's amorous caprices and ambition knew no bounds. She conceived the plan of ruling the entire peninsula from Rome, to become Queen or Empress of Italy. Like Hamlet's mother, Marozia had fallen in love, with the brother of her spouse. Hugo, King of Lombardy, either really enamoured of the mistress of Rome, or *thinking* that Rome was well worth a love declaration—returned her love, and persuaded the object of his passion to remove the obstacle standing in the way of their happiness. A *fratricide* was only a trifling matter in those days of mediævalism. Brother and wife hesitated but little to mix a drop of poison in the cup of wine which Marozia smilingly handed to her unsuspecting spouse. It was a loving-cup which sent poor Guido to his early grave, leaving vacant the place by the side of his wife. Hugo knew that the dowry was the possession of Rome. He appeared with his army before the gate of Rome in 932 and entered the city, accompanied by a small



and select suite. Guido once removed, Hugo married Marozia, the mother of His Holiness, and began to rule Rome after the manner of an Oriental despot. Marozia styled herself, *Senatrix* and *Patricia*.

In St. Angelo, where three years before a Pope had been throttled, and where many of his successors were to live in happiness and misfortune, the marriage of the mistress of Rome, the mother of His Holiness, was solemnised with Hugo, king of Italy. The latter now also hoped to obtain the Imperial Crown. And so sure was he of his success that he treated the Romans as his vassals. But the Tarpeian Rock is near the Capitol. A palace revolution was at hand. Marozia, during her *liaison* with Pope Sergius III, had also had in her early youth a love affair with Count Adalbert of Tuscany, and a son Alberic was the fruit of this union. Unwillingly did this scion of the ancient house submit to the rule of the foreigner. The air was impregnated with discontent, which soon spread amongst the families of the aristocracy. It required but a small incident to let the glimmering spark of rebellion break out into flames. During a meal the stepson clumsily upset a basin of water over the hands of the stepfather, and a box on the ears was King Hugo's prompt punishment. Such an insult Alberic would not forgive. His resentment was worked upon by his aunt, Theodora the younger, a daughter of Theodora the elder and of Pope John XI—and a sister of Marozia. Aunt and

nephew were living in close intimacy, and Theodora jealous of the power and influence of her son, availed herself of the incident to excite her father against his mother and stepfather.

Count Alberic, partly following his own desire for revenge, and partly anxious to please his dear son, resolved upon action, and having joined the discontented citizens gathered round his banner, promptly raised the standard of rebellion. His mother and her spouse should be expelled from Rome. From all parts of the city the discontented citizens gathered round his banner, and before King Hugo had had time to summon his troops St. Angelo was stormed. King Hugo only just found time to escape, whilst his wife and her son, Pope John XI, were taken prisoners. The mother was thrown into a dungeon and scarcely given a moment wherein to reflect upon her stormy life—before she soon died of poison. Thus perished that remarkable woman, mistress of one Pope, mother of another, wife of a king, her vast ambition had led her to a violent death in a narrow prison cell. Nature had endowed her with powerful faculties and political subtlety, and she had made subservient to her popes and kings and nobles. On the very day however on which she conceived the idea of uniting her fate to that of a king of foreign extraction in order to subjugate the Roman people, she had signed her own death warrant.

His Holiness Pope John XI was kept under strict supervision in the Lateran. Alberic appointed himself consul and senator, was anxious to make the Papa

power hereditary in his family. In St. Peter's Church he made the leaders of his party promise to raise his youthful son, Octavianus, the son of his mistress, Theodora the younger, upon the apostolic throne. In 955 the eighteen-year-old boy actually became Pope—under the name of John XII; and in the veins of the new Pontiff pulsed the blood of two generations of licentious women, very Messalinas. The grandson of Theodora the elder, the son of Theodora the younger, and the nephew of Marozia was worthy of his relations. He was a slave of passion, and his love affairs were even more numerous than those of Sergius III. John XII was the first Pope to change his name, a custom which was followed by his successors. This boy of unbridled passions was not satisfied with the power he had obtained—he wished to extend it over the southern provinces of Italy. Placing himself at the head of his own troops and the auxiliaries of Spoleto, he therefore set out against the dukes of Capua and Salerno; but having suffered a defeat, he called Otho I, king of Germany, to his assistance. Unaware of the life His Holiness was leading, the German Emperor appeared with his army in Italy. He besieged Count Beringar II of *Ivrea* and Friuli, and triumphantly marched against Rome, where John XII set the Imperial Crown upon his head. The Pope thus recognised the superiority of the Emperor, and the Romans made a solemn promise never to elect a Pope without the permission of the Emperor. Scarcely, however, had

Otho left the Roman territory, when the Holy Father, breaking his oath, went over to the side of Beringar.

The Emperor was astonished, and secretly sent faithful messengers to Rome to inquire into the state of affairs, and into the cause of the Pope's faithlessness. Great was the astonishment of the envoys when they learned what life Pope John XII was leading.

"Sire," said the leader of the deputation, when they had returned to the Emperor, "we have learned most distressing news—and Roman citizens are complaining bitterly against the conduct of His Holiness."

"But why does he hate me?" asked Otho.

"He hates you, sire, for no other reason than that which makes the devil hate the Creator," replied the courtier, inclined to flattery. "Your Majesty is anxious to do what is right and just and to protect with your glorious arms all that is good in temporal or clerical power, which Your Majesty adorns by his conduct and ameliorates by his laws. Not so the Pope. Pope John XII is an enemy of all that is good."

Silently and with sinister mien the Emperor sat on his throne, listening to the report which his faithful servants had brought from Rome.

"And could you specify the crimes of the Holy Father?" asked Otho.

"Yes, the citizens of Rome relate that ever since this Pontiff has ascended the throne of St. Peter,

honest women are afraid to visit either the graves of the Apostles or other holy places, which they were in the habit of frequenting for prayers. For worse than the danger of the Saracens is that which threatens their honour from Pope John. Only a few days ago virgins, widows, and married women have been dragged into the Palace of the Pope.\*

"Those, however, who willingly run into this papal *lupanar*," continued the messenger, "are numerous. The courtesans of Papal Rome are as many as those which promenaded in the *Via Sacra* in the days of the pagan Emperors Heliogabulus and Caligula. The streets of Rome have become the rendezvous and meeting-places of debauchery and *prurience*.

"A whole army of courtesans has now invaded Rome, the Holy City, and numerous are the victims they are making, more numerous than those made by the infidels; for they are slaying body and soul. And the Roman matrons, the descendants and bearers of great Roman names, mothers of families, before whom the law bends down with veneration, are copying the modes and manners of the courtesans, and are being incited to sin by the Holy Father himself.

"At table, this Pontiff, the head of Christendom, drinks the health of the devil, and often invokes the help of Jupiter, of Venus, and of other demons."

John XII was deposed, and Pope Leo VIII appointed as his successor.

The Emperor had left Italy being convinced that peace and calm had now been re-established but he had counted without the intriguing Pope John XII was the darling of the ladies of the Eternal City and in those days of mediæval and Christian Rome the noble ladies of aristocracy wielded unlimited power So many of them were favourites and paramours of His Holiness that they decided to restate their idol upon the throne of St Peter Discontent was stirred up among the Romans and aided and abetted by their friends and relations the women stormed the Lateran and brought back their protégé John to the Papal chair Thus the love of the Roman ladies for the Pontiff regained for him the tiara

Pope Leo VIII escaped seeking refuge in the camp of the Emperor At Cambrino Otho received the first information of the revolt and at once marched against Rome—when news reached him of the sudden death of Pope John XII

In a secret apartment of the Lateran the Pontiff was reposing from his fatigues and troubles He was not alone—for with him was the wife of a noble Roman a lady whom the Holy Father had abducted and made his mistress She had secretly disappeared from the house of her husband and thought herself safe from pursuit under the protection of her holy lover And yet every noise, every step outside the Papal inner apartments made the fair lady tremble and bury her head in the breast of her lover

"Why are you trembling, dearest?" asked John.

"Oh, my husband," she replied. "You don't know how furious he will be when he discovers my absence: he will not leave a stone in Rome unturned, and Heaven be merciful unto us if he discovers us!"

"He will not dare to come here," replied His Holiness. "You are safe with me."

His Holiness was mistaken. He had evidently not counted upon the jealousy of woman. They were all mad on him, were those noble ladies of Rome, and his preference for his mistress of the moment, for this little *ingénue*, made more than one of the others swear revenge, and the hiding-place of the guilty wife was indicated to the outraged husband.

Hark—a clash of steel, a scuffle, the janissaries of the Pope object, but they are killed by the infuriated husband; and in the presence of His Holiness and the adulteress stands that terror of all Lovelaces and Don Juans—a jealous husband, murder in his eyes! In his hand the Pope sees the sword ready to strike, and the trembling woman is kneeling and clinging to the garment of the Vicar of Christ.

The Vicar of Christ! John remembered it at this supreme moment. Was he not the Pontiff, in whose hands lay the power to bind and to loosen? Were not the keys to Heaven in his possession? Could he not release the damned souls suffering in Inferno, and by the magic of his word transfer them into the company of the blessed? In that moment, as if in

a vision John saw the great power of Papal Rome he saw kings and emperors kneel in the dust and kiss the feet of the Pontiff he saw one inheritor of Charlemagne lead the horse of the Holy Father and he perceived another a gaunt figure standing bareheaded and barefooted in the bitter cold awaiting the decision of the Pope For a moment the Pontiff's courage revived

Stop! he cried down with that murderous sword Do you dare to question to doubt to accuse me your spiritual father me the Vicar of Christ! Tremble for your eternal welfare—kneel down and implore my forgiveness—lest I should—in my righteous indignation—send thee down to perdition for all eternity

Too late all the wild passions which the flesh is heir to were let loose in the heart of the maddened husband! What did he care at that moment for the excommunication of the Pope and for his own eternal salvation? He saw before him the man who had seduced his wife he found the faithless woman in the arms of his rival! It was enough to make the blood of twenty generations of paganism run hot hammer and beat at his forehead sweep away and obliterate any feeling of Christianity and forgiveness Besides was not the man before him was not his conduct sufficient to destroy all the jealous husband's reverence for the Holy Church?

Tremble before your excommunication he roared You are the very Antichrist—for whose benediction or curse I care little Heaven will not



listen to your requests—and the curse will sooner fall on your own head than on mine. Too many are the sinning Magdalenes whom you have taken to your bosom."

And down came the murderous sword upon the head that wore the Holy Crown. Pope John XII's life had come to a premature end—for he was only twenty-five. The outraged husband sent him down to his grave without even so much as giving him time for a prayer. Yet—so great is the strength of habit and inveterate belief, that scarcely did the avenger behold the inanimate, bleeding body of the Pontiff before him, than, without heeding the fainting woman, without a thought for, or fear of, the justice of man, he trembled as he realised his sacrilegious deed. He had assassinated the anointed of the Lord. Madly he rushed from the Lateran and threw himself into the Tiber. Thus ended Pope John XII, the darling of the frail and fair ladies of Rome.

The successors of John XII on the Papal throne were not less addicted to the love of women than the Popes whose love affairs have just been related. At the age of twelve Benedict IX had ascended the throne of St. Peter. "And this precocious child," says the monk Glaber, "had numerous love intrigues with married women and with virgins, ready to listen to the amorous declarations of the Vicar of Christ."

The Romans, and especially the offended husbands, fathers, and brothers, revolted at last and

drove the Don Juan on the Papal throne from Rome. Soon however, Benedict again returned to the Vatican, for the mighty Counts of Tusculum had taken up his defence. His short exile had not taught him anything, and far from having become wiser, he continued his life of debauchery. And so strong were his passions that there was no room in his heart even for ambition. Feeling that the Romans would not suffer him as their spiritual leader for any length of time, he preferred to abandon the throne rather than change his mode of life. He would live in obscure privacy and indulge in love intrigues rather than rule Christendom and be compelled to observe, to some extent at least, the laws of decency and of moderation. For a sum of about £200 in English money, Benedict IX ceded his pontificate to a more ambitious prelate, whilst he himself retired upon his estate in the vicinity of Rome, where he freely addicted himself to the interesting game of love. Surrounded by a regular harem this ex-Pontiff passed his days in *dulce jubilo*. Benedict IX like other great sinners loved a great deal and when he could love no more he repented—and made his peace with Heaven.

His conscience suddenly awoke. He called to him Bartholomæus the abbot of *Grotta Ferrata* confessed his sins and asked for absolution. The Father Confessor told the ex Pontiff that he was unworthy of forgiveness but a life of repentance and pious deeds would nevertheless gain for him

the grace of Heaven. Thus the repentant Don Juan passed the last days of his life in the Convent of Grotta-Ferrata, praying, fasting, and mortifying the flesh which he had so much indulged in the days of his youth !

## CHAPTER III

### THE STORY OF POPE JOAN, THE FEMALE POPE WHO SAT ON THE THRONE OF ST PETER

It is not altogether rare in history, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, to see examples of women who, denying their sex, have adopted man's garb so as to be able to take a more active part in either the government of a State or in science and art, the free participation in which centuries of man made laws have denied them. Women have also ruled empires and commanded armies, have distinguished themselves on various fields of human activity, while disguised in man's attire. But the story of the woman who is supposed to have attained to the headship of the Church is one of the most interesting.

Indeed it is an example so unique in history that it has been styled a fable even by Protestants and opponents of the Catholic Church, although authorities vouchsafe for the veracity and authenticity of the facts. Gibbon goes so far as to declare the story of Popess Joan as false, but *not as utterly incredible*. And a learned scholar and traveller—Maximilian Misson, who visited the Church of St John of the Lateran in 1743, in describing the

famous *chaise percée*, says: "About seventy or eighty learned and erudite men, none of whom can be considered suspect in his testimony, as they were all members of the Church of Rome, have positively declared that a woman sat on the throne of St. Peter."

And why should the Church of Rome take so much trouble to prove this story a fable when Cardinal Baronius does not hesitate to declare "that many monsters have occupied the Papal throne?" And indeed, in a century when Theodoras and Marozias—the mighty mistresses—elected and deposed Pontiffs, why should not one of them have disguised her sex, and seated herself on the throne of St. Peter, instead of raising her lover to the dignity?

I am perfectly well aware of the fact that modern historians have endeavoured to prove that Joan never existed; that her story is a fable, a malicious fable invented by detractors of Papism. It may be so; but it is nevertheless strange to see them employ their learning to prove the absurdity of one fable whilst they never question the truth of many others. Some acquaintance, however, with early mediævalism, with the period when the event of Pope Joan is supposed to have occurred, will make it clear to the student that such an event was within the bounds of possibility in those days. The Popes who preceded and immediately followed Pope Joan had contrived to usurp the Papal dignity, not by means of their personal merit, but through all sorts of intrigues. Baronius calls them criminals and

execrable monsters ' They have filled the Church," he says, "with such infamy that the very thought of it makes one blush and tremble And the persecution which the Church has suffered from its most cruel persecutors is only child's play in comparison to the harm and injury done to it in consequence of the abominations of the Popes of the ninth century ' Women ruled in Rome in those days, and it was not at all a rare thing to see women hiding their sex, and entering the Church in men's garb There have been several women who entered monasteries disguised as men Eugenia, daughter of Philip, governor of Alexandria, entered the monastery and became superior, and never would her secret have been divulged had she not herself *recognised the necessity of acknowledging her identity* Theodora of Alexandria was another woman who entered a convent as a monk where she passed her life

It is not, however, my intention to weary the reader with the enumeration of the arguments *pro* and *con* the existence of Pope Joan I shall simply relate the story as it has been transmitted by various authors—and referring the reader to the voluminous bibliography (of especially Brunet, P J, *La Papesse Jeanne* 1880, for bibliography) on the subject leave him to decide for himself whether it is a legend or an historical fact

It happened at the beginning of the ninth century The Saxons, subjugated by Charlemagne, had been forced to embrace the faith of Christianity, and to

progress and was a match for the most learned and eminent scholars at the universities. She had not yet attained her thirteenth summer when she publicly discussed and argued on the most difficult philosophical problems, and fluently conversed in German, English, and Italian. She knew Latin, and was well versed, thanks to the instruction given to her by her ecclesiastical parent, in Church History and Theology. In short, she was an infant prodigy. But her culture of mind was coupled with a rare and wonderful beauty, which brought many admirers to her feet, anxious not only to listen to the words of wisdom falling from her lips but also to kiss them. Joan's heart was not insensible to the flattery and protestations of her admirers. She favoured, however, a young monk of Fulda, who pleased her both by his personal appearance and his vast learning. They were both handsome and cultured, and their love was based upon an affection deep and lasting. Theirs was a union both of body and soul. For a girl like Joan conventions and *bourgeois* virtues did not exist, and any obstacles standing in the way of her happiness she would soon find means to obviate. She conceived the daring idea of assuming masculine garb and of joining the monastery of Fulda so as to be near her lover. And thus Joan became John the Englishman, a monk at Fulda destined one day to occupy the throne of St. Peter. After a sojourn of two months within the convent walls fearing detection, the lovers escaped in the silence of the night and

travelled through Europe until they at last reached Athens, where they remained for many years. They studied the treasured lore of ancient Hellas and accumulated vast and wonderful knowledge. Athens was still a seat of learning, and the lovers were able to increase their erudition in the ancient city. Joan studied literature, *belles-lettres*, history, science, and above all theology, and was admired by scholars and men of letters for her knowledge and natural gift. The names of the pair became famous, and their reputation for learning spread far and wide. One day, however—was it a sudden desire for change, or some other cause?—by mutual consent they decided to separate. They left Athens; and whilst the monk of Fulda turned his face to the East, where he hoped to investigate the secrets of the mystic and mysterious Orient, Joan turned towards the West.

The monk of Fulda went as far as Egypt, visited Alexandria, the ancient seat of learning, and the banks of the Nile. He searched the ruins of Thebes and stood at the foot of the Pyramids, asking the Sphinx to solve him the riddle of the universe. He travelled to ancient Phœnicia, visited the Holy Land and traversed the Euphrates. His peregrinations led him as far as Bagdad, where the successors of Mohammed, the Khalifahs, had raised the banner of Islam and established the residence of the brilliant Mohammedan rule and a seat and centre of the glorious Arabian civilisation. Bagdad at that time was what Athens had been in the days



of Pericles "Wisdom raised her voice in the thoroughfares," schools of learning and academies flourished everywhere, and in the streets, still re-echoing with the memory of Haroun al-Raschid and the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, the monk of Fulda had time to forget for a while his cultured mistress, and to plunge his yearning soul, thirsting for knowledge, into the ocean of Eastern learning. The lore of mystic Chaldea, the teaching of Zoroaster and Brahma were forced to yield their secrets unto him.

And whilst he was conversing and arguing with the wise men of the East, Joan, or John the Englishman, wended her way to Rome. The Eternal City, the residence of the Pontiffs, the pride and glory of Christendom, attracted her attention. Here, she knew, was a vast field where her marvellous talents would find ample scope and where she could satisfy her ambitions. She continued to keep her disguise and to don masculine garb, and as it was customary in those days in Italy to shave, no suspicion could possibly be raised with regard to her sex. When Joan reached Rome, Sergius II was seated on the throne of St. Peter. With curious presentiments, Joan rode through the gates of Rome. Did she foresee that one day she would rule Christendom from the banks of the Tiber? The Eternal City at that time was a hotbed of factions and intestine wars, but although her ancient splendour had suffered greatly Rome was still the centre where all that was brilliant converged. The talents, the

grace, and sweetness of Joan made a sensation in Roman circles. The young *savant* was courted, and hopes entered his, or rather her bosom ! Here she displayed so much learning, and such brilliancy that Joan, or John the Englishman, was looked upon as one of the most learned men of the century. Dignitaries of State, priests, and scholars were not ashamed to sit at her feet—and be her disciples.

Not only the erudition of the young professor, but also his modesty and simple life, his purity of manners and moral conduct were considered worthy of the highest praise. Joan, in disguising her sex, had altered her entire *mode* of life—and Christendom soon became her dupe. If Pope Joan really existed, she was an adventuress who compels, to some extent, the admiration of posterity. She had become so popular and such a favourite of the people and the clergy, of cardinals and bishops that she began to aspire to the Sacred Crown.

The atmosphere of the city on the Tiber, the atmosphere which had nourished and fostered the ambitions of a Marius and a Sulla, of a Cæsar and an Augustus, of a Nero and an Odoaker *et tutti quanti*, put the flame of ambition into the heart of Joan, alias John the Englishman. Knowledge was power in those days of mediævalism, and in an age of darkness he who could hold the torch of learning was sure of success. Joan decided to avail herself of her learning and attain to high honours. Hitherto she had studied and accumulated erudition for the sole pleasure of knowing, but now it was power

she was striving after. The Church appeared to her the best field where she could reap the harvest of her labour. She decided now to hide for ever the secret of her sex and to become a member of that powerful organisation which was extending its sway over the European world. Outside the walls of the Eternal City there existed at that time a monastery consecrated to St Martin, where theology and *belles lettres* were being taught in Greek and in Latin. St Augustus is supposed to have once been a teacher at this famous college. Joan entered this abode of learning, was ordained a priest, and from the professional chair astonished her hearers and disciples with the profundity of her knowledge and the vastness of her erudition. The fame of the young professor spread beyond the confines of Rome. The monks, ignorant that she was a woman, called her John the Englishman, the defender of the law and a treatise which this young professor had written against the Iconoclasts, whose doctrine the Emperors of Rome were favouring, created a stir in the Christian learned world.

Pope Sergius died in the meantime, and at his death the Church passed through a critical moment—for whilst the intestine quarrels were still continuing, the Saracens were threatening Italy with an invasion. A wise and learned priest became Pope Leo IV. The new Pontiff had known Joan at the College of St Martin, and he continued to honour her with his esteem and friendship.

On more than one occasion the new Pope had

thundering missive of the Pope—Anastasius replied with mockery and rebellious words

The patience of Leo had been exhausted and a synod consisting of 45 cardinals 143 bishops and 587 abbots and priests was convened to judge the rebellious priest Joan in her capacity of Secretary of State had to read the accusation and she displayed such eloquence and ingenuity that the assembly was struck with admiration Anastasius was unanimously deprived of his rank and at the recommendation of Pope Leo his Secretary of State was raised to the dignity of Cardinal Modestly the clever woman accepted the new honours declaring herself an unworthy servant of the Church and the most unworthy of the Cardinals Such humility pleased the prelates

Leo IV died and the Papal Conclave proceeded to elect a new Pope Many candidates there were anxious to obtain the keys of St Peter and neither gold nor blood was spared to assure victory By means of intrigues and cabals the rivals vied with each other for the supreme honour each endeavouring to conquer the throne of St Peter At last—to pacify all parties—the choice fell upon an outsider whose learning and wisdom entitled him to the high dignity and whose choice was sure of becoming popular in Rome The conclave elected John the Englishman to the honour of wearing the Papal Crown And thus Joan the maid of Mayence became Vicar of Christ under the name of John VIII

In selecting Joan to the throne of St Peter the

## THE STORY OF POPE JOAN.

Cardinals may have yielded to popular pressure John was a great favourite with the populace of Rome. More than once they had expressed wish to see the amiable Secretary-Pontiff in place of the morose Leo. And as soon as Leo died—and the news had scarcely spread through the city—the people at once flocked in their thousands to the Vatican, shouting: "Long live John VIII." Flowers were strewn in her way and when Joan appeared in the funeral procession of the last Pope, noble Romans, like so many Walter Raleighs, spread their coats and costly tabbies in the street for the future Pope to walk upon. The enthusiastic youth of Rome carried their favourite on their shoulders through the streets of the city of the Cæsars. And now, even if some among the Cardinals had looked askance at the election of the popular Cardinal to the Pontifical dignity, they felt it wise to yield to the *vox populi*. The mobs of the ninth century were of different mettle from crowds in our own days. They struck no jokes when their ire was roused. And were the adversaries of Joan, had they dared to contradict popular choice.

Women have reigned before and since Joan. From vast empires and controlled the destinies of nations. From Semiramis to Catherine II, from Zenobia to Queen Elizabeth, many women have worn a crown and wielded a sceptre—many have and will continue to wield it in some realm or kingdom, political, social, or intellectual; but Joan became head of the

powerful organisation the Church—the keeper of the keys of heaven the ruler of earth and hell

John the Englishman was now Pope The populace of Rome applauded the election and expressed great joy in seeing once more a wise and intelligent ruler on the Pontifical throne

Pope Joan ruled with wisdom and benevolence and Christendom content with the new Holy Father witnessed many proofs of his sagacity Many abuses were done away with a system of economy introduced and the Papal coffers which had been emptied during the invasion of the Saracens were refilled The Iconoclasts were excommunicated and mighty sovereigns came from far to prostrate themselves before the Vicar of Christ and to kiss the *shoe* of the Prince of the Apostles The King of England is supposed to have come to Rome accompanied by his son Alfred afterwards known as the Great Did none of the many sovereigns, prelates and magnates who came to prostrate themselves before and kiss the foot of His Holiness perceive or at least doubt the identity of the Pope? Who can tell? But now that Joan had attained the height of earthly power now that her craving for ambition had been satisfied beyond her expectations and that her wildest dreams had been realised she suddenly felt like the author of *Ecclesiasticus* that all was vain Ambition however although at moments stronger in woman than in man is not of very long duration in the feminine heart Victor Hugo, in his famous

play *Hernani*, relates how Charles V, elected Emperor, suddenly sees himself upon the dizzy pyramid, kings, princes, counts, nobles and the masses far beneath; his heart is swelled with ambition—and there is scarcely any room for love within it. Such is never, or at least rarely, the case with woman, unless she is very masculine or perverse—and then she is no longer a real woman! Joan took a dislike to public affairs, to the government of the Church; the woman in her began to assert herself. She had had enough of being worshipped and adored and obeyed; she wanted to be loved. She almost regretted those days of her youth when, poor, unknown, without any prospects for the future, she had tramped, by the side of her companion, through many lands, free and happy, loving and beloved. And now on the summit of that pyramid to which she ought never to have dared to lift her eyes, surrounded by wealth and greatness and splendour, she felt alone.

During her first years in Rome, whilst living in poverty, Joan had led an exemplary life, cared for nothing but her studies and was anxious to increase her knowledge. During the first months of her pontificate, she also seems to have followed in the footsteps of the good Popes. She knew that she was committing a sacrilege; that Christianity had too low an estimate of her sex to allow a woman to ascend the Papal throne. She availed herself of all the prerogatives appertaining to her holy office. And whilst conferring holy orders, appointing

priests and ordaining bishops singing masses consecrating temples and altars administering the sacraments and offering her feet to be kissed by the faithful she also continued her studies

Soon however she fell into temptations She was surrounded by men whom she could choose as lovers Yet her case was different from those of a Semiramis and a Catherine of an Elizabeth or an Anne and other queens and empresses Joan had to be assured of the absolute devotion and discretion of her favourite and many a time and often she thought of her lover the handsome monk of Fulda She remembered the happy hours they had passed together on the classic soil of Athens—where she had tasted the pleasures of mind and of matter alike She was free and happy then whilst now in the midst of all the pomp she was only a slave a slave of conventions obliged to lead a life which was incompatible with her ardent nature and temperament Who knows perhaps a feeling of remorse had entered her heart? She was a woman—and the idea of the equality of the sexes destined to make such rapid strides a thousand years later was something monstrous to the minds of the people of early mediævalism Joan felt that she was usurping the Papal crown and that constant danger was hovering over her head She felt the necessity of finding a *confidant* and a lover among the young prelates who surrounded her in whose embraces she could find consolation for the many torments which were troubling her mind and her body



Among the chamberlains attached to the service of the Pontiff, was one of the name of Baldello ; a youth who had the good fortune to attract the attention of the female Pope. Baldello, a Florentine by birth, bore a striking resemblance to the monk of Fulda, and Joan distinguished him by her marked preference and favour. He was appointed private chamberlain of Joan, and initiated into the secret and mystery which shrouded the personality of the Pontiff. Did Joan declare her love to her favourite, like so many libertine empresses and queens who reigned in their own rights ? Or did the lover discover her identity and avail himself of the advantages he had thus acquired ?

Young Baldello became the lover of the Pope. Legend relates that on that night a statue of the Virgin suddenly fell to the ground and was broken into a thousand pieces, that an image of St Peter turned black, and that the moon was eclipsed, covering as it were its brilliance with a veil—in sign of shame. Henceforth Joan lived mostly in her apartments, and rarely appeared in public. And whilst the people imagined that the Pope was practising devotions and working for the honour and the glory of the Church, Joan was tasting the delights of love in the arms of Baldello.

Important affairs of State and Church were being left to the ministers, who reigned in the name of the Pope. Nature, however, took her revenge. Pope Joan was on the point of giving birth to a child ; and great was the distress of her lover, who foresaw the

fate awaiting them. Joan however, was of good cheer. She relied upon the superstition of the Catholic world in the ninth century. To work a wonder and make Christendom believe in a miracle would be easy for an inventive brain like hers.

A thought even crossed her mind of making Papacy hereditary. Was not the temporal power a hereditary privilege? Was not the Khalif of Bagdad the head of the Moslem religion and did not his son reign after him? A woman? And why should not woman be equal to man? she exclaimed and a wave of revolt swept through her delicate frame! Have I not been endowed with capacities superior to those of the prelates around me? Have I not governed the Church to the satisfaction of Christendom? Have I not shown to the world that a woman can rule as well as a man that a woman can occupy the throne of St. Peter with as much as nay more dignity than a man? Such thoughts on the equality of the sexes commonplace in our age but which could not but sound monstrous to the men of her century agitated the brain of the clever adventuress on the Papal throne. She had courage enough for anything but alas! she felt that she was alone—and detection meant sure and ignominious death only a miracle real or worked by herself could save her and her lover. She knew that by introducing the will of Heaven one could obtain almost everything in an age of superstition and that all the founders of religion when address-

ing themselves to primitive nations, never spoke in their own names, but in that of a divinity whose messengers they were. Daring thoughts traversed Joan's mind—she thought of the many miracles which a credulous humanity had accepted, of the holy legends and metamorphoses upon which the religions of the East and of the West had been based. Did not Greece believe the quick-changes of the Olympians, did not Jupiter assume so many garbs, changing himself into animals of all kinds and into a golden rain, when he decided to penetrate into the tower of the royal maid Danæ? The mythological fables constituting the religious creeds of European and Asiatic humanity were so many, and had found so easy acceptance, that one more could easily be added to the number. And what contemplative sons of the mystic and mysterious Orient have believed, what philosophic Hellas once accepted unquestioningly in its childish simplicity, should not mediæval Christendom believe as truth and cry *urbi et orbi*: a wonder, a miracle has happened.

But strange to say Joan, that clever woman who had managed to hoodwink and almost bewitch all men, failed in hiding her pregnancy. It is this fact which many authors have brought forward as an argument, proving the improbability of the story of Pope Joan. But why not quote—a thing which Catholic authors ought to have done—the Biblical passage, “And He makes wise men stupid”? Why not say that Heaven would no longer endure

the blasphemy of a woman reigning as Pope and decreed her punishment ?

There is a story related by some historians that one day whilst Pope Joan was presiding over an ecclesiastical council a man possessed by a demon was brought before her to be exorcised. Joan asked the demon who had chosen the body of the poor tortured victim as his abode when he would give that man freedom. I shall leave this body replied the demon when you who are Pope and Father of Fathers will show me a child born of a Popess !

Papa Pater Patrum Papissæ pandito patrum  
 Ut tibi tunc cedam de corpore quando recedam

The lines are not in the best Latin style of the age of Cicero but are not bad for a demon who as is well known is usually fond of speaking in rhymes. One author is of opinion that if Joan was unable to hide her pregnancy it was due to her ignorance in matters of obstetrics. She had for so many years been only among men and prided as a man. Other historians however maintain that Joan would have carried out her designs and in any case escaped detection and her fatal doom had not jealousy played her an unpleasant turn and made her plans futile until it was too late and events necessarily had to take their course.

Twelve years had elapsed since Joan had parted at Athens from her former lover the monk of Fulda

She thought him dead or a slave of some slave-trafficking, infidel Turks. But as chance would have it, at that moment the monk of Fulda turned up in Rome. For twelve long years he had wandered under the Eastern skies, had gleaned knowledge and learning everywhere, and unravelled many riddles of the universe ; he had forced nature to yield to him many of her secrets, and acquired wisdom and stores of learning. And now, like another Faust, he suddenly craved for human joys. He remembered his companion of Fulda and of Athens and wondered whether she was still alive. A yearning seized his heart, and he decided to proceed to Rome, where he hoped to learn of her whereabouts. Arrived in the Holy City, he took up his lodgings with a native of Piedmont and discreetly inquired from his host whether he had heard of a certain John the Englishman. The host looked surprised at the stranger, who seemed to be ignorant of the fact that John the Englishman was Pontiff of Rome and seated on St. Peter's throne. News did not travel so fast in those days, but surely Christian Europe knew the name of the Pope ! The stranger had evidently arrived from the Far East, and the host kindly informed him of the past history of John the Englishman, as it was known to the people of Rome. Arrived in Rome twelve years ago, he had gained popularity and had been elected Pope after the death of Leo IV. " For some years," so the chatty host continued, " the people had nothing but praise for the wise and benevolent

Pontifical ruler, but times have changed, and now His Holiness scarcely shows his face to the people. Every thing is done by one of his chamberlains, who is in great favour with him and whom many suspect to be the nephew or the son of John. Strange rumours are afloat and are being whispered concerning the origin of the present Vicar of Christ. Some say that his origin is very obscure, whilst others give him an illustrious parentage. They make him a younger brother of the King of Britain or a cousin of the Emperor of Byzantium. Thus the host of the travelling monk. The latter could scarcely believe the tale which the other was unfolding. The former lover of Joan decided to seek an audience of the Pope and to find out the truth for himself. Could the companion of his youth have dared to practise such an imposture? Could she a woman, although clever, intelligent and erudite as she was, have baffled cardinals and prelates and escaped detection? He passed a sleepless night tormented as he was by doubts which thronged his reeling brain. Early next morning he sought an audience of the Holy Father. An Englishman, he said, 'has urgent business with His Holiness.' Joan had a weakness for Englishmen and the monk was speedily admitted into the august presence of the ruler of Christendom. In spite of the years which had passed and the surroundings so different from those of Athens where the lovers had separated twelve years ago the monk quickly recognised Joan in the disguise of

Pope. After the first surprise at the unexpected meeting, Joan proceeded to explain to her friend how she had contrived to become Pope. She expressed the hope that he would now remain in Rome, where, assured of the benevolence of His Holiness, he would rise to high dignities, and end his days in peace. Was it jealousy or was it the sense of right which suddenly filled the breast of the monk? He indignantly repulsed the woman-Pope and threw his curse into her face: "You are a monster of iniquity," he cried, "in daring to mock the wrath of Heaven. Truly, it is you to whom the book of the Apocalypse is referring when it describes the great adulteress. You have profaned the temple of God and the sanctuary of the Lord, and you dare to accept the worship and the adoration of the Christian world! It is of you that the Apocalypse says: 'And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of

abominations and filthiness of her fornication And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration' Verily, it is to you that these words apply You are a disgrace to the holy faith, and you are the abomination of the clergy I predict for you the punishment indicated in Holy Writ '*and dogs will devour your flesh and tear you in pieces as they did with the carcass of impious Jezebel*' "

And whilst her former lover, hurriedly and agitated by his moral indignation, was leaving the holy precincts Joan was left to ruminate over his words Her usual courageous presence of mind abandoned her and she was a prey to most sinister thoughts and misgivings Thus Baldello found her, and in vain did he endeavour to rouse the spirit of his mistress She seemed to have resigned herself to her doom and awaited the hand of Heaven to come down upon her She lacked the courage to abandon the apostolic seat and, in the company of her lover in the silence of the night, to escape from Rome to some obscure corner Wealth and power had, after all, too strong a hold upon her She brooded over the means, thinking how she could avoid detection, in those moments of extreme mental exhaustion and nervous breakdown, she had



hallucinations; thus various legends arose with regard to visions she is supposed to have had. Some historians record a legend, which found current belief in the days of the Reformation, and runs as follows: In her moments of dire distress, when this adventuress on St. Peter's throne was taking council with herself, wavering as to the course she should adopt—an angel suddenly appeared unto her, "Choose," he said to the poor woman, "choose between my right hand and my left. The one contains the eternal fire, whilst the other is full of the shame and disgrace which will be meted out to you on earth." Joan is supposed to have preferred the contempt of mankind and their punishment rather than the wrath of Heaven. Another legend related that at that time strange happenings occurred and that the minds of men were troubled by wonderful phenomena, clearly announcing the wrath of Heaven to the superstitious crowds of early mediævalism. The Tiber overflowed its bank, inundated the country, carried away churches and houses, and drowned men and beasts. The locust devastated the harvest and ruined the vine. The people, maddened by such calamities, clamoured for the intervention of the Pope. Cannot the Holy Father, who commands the celestial powers, can he not excommunicate the evil forces? One word and he can deliver us from our distress. But the Holy Father remained inactive. Alas! he was weak in the presence of the laws of nature! Joan could circumvent human minds, but blind natural forces

mocked at her intelligence. The infuriated mob assembled at the gates of the Vatican. One could almost hear the voice of revolt which Luther, the son of the Thuringian peasant, was to raise six centuries later, resound in the distance. The hydrahead of revolution stared the Pope in the face. The rabble of Rome were convinced that a gesture of the Pontiff would suffice to deliver the city from the various sufferings. And they angrily asked why the Vicar of Christ held his hands in his pockets, when, like Moses, he needed only to extend it over the sea for the water to dry up, or to work similar miracles. The hostile and ambitious cardinals fermented the uproar. Working in obscurity, they at last contrived that the *caraville* appeared threatening before the gates of the Vatican. Pale and trembling Baldello appeared. "Your Holiness," he exclaimed; "we are lost—the city is in a state of uproar, and the people are clamouring for a miracle." At last Joan, persuaded by her lover, appeared on the balcony to appease the popular excitement. Her pale face and her sadness had a magic effect upon the mob. She stretched out her hand as if in benediction, announcing to the assembled masses that to-morrow, in a holy procession, she would anathematise the locusts and deliver Rome from that scourge. In the meantime, however, she would hurl her curse against all those who would not instantly return to their homes. The promise and the threat had their effect—and immediately the crowd dispersed. Papal excom-

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munication was a powerful weapon in the ninth century in the hands of the chiefs of Christendom. The next day Rome was astir, the good people of Rome loved those splendid processions of the Church. The ceremony of the Rogations was still a relic of the pagan past. For at that period the ancient Romans used to sacrifice to their Olympian deities, imploring their protection for the fertility of the fields, dancing and banqueting round the altars of Ceres and of Bacchus, the gods of bread and wine. The Church had adopted the ceremonies so dear to the popular mind, often utilising them for the glory of Christianity. The altars of Ceres and Bacchus were erected in honour of the Madonna and the Christian saints. The church bells of Rome sounded the glad tidings, and confidently everybody awaited the miracle. Bishops, priests, and monks assembled at the Vatican; in their thousands the people had come to witness the wonder wrought by the Holy Father. In the last moment her lover implored her not to appear in public, but Joan could scarcely cancel her promise, although she had gloomy presentiments. The air was impregnated with holy incense, the church bells were ringing and announcing her doom to Joan. Slowly the successor of St. Peter advanced at the head of the holy procession, acclaimed by the masses. From a thousand throats the sounds of holy hymns mounted heavenwards, and the shout "*Ora pro nobis,*" was re-echoed from Rome's seven hills.

Bearers of crosses, standards, and holy images

marched in front, followed by monks and holy friars, bending low their heads, covered with ashes in sign of repentance. Nuns and deaconesses, virgins and married women, all in the attitude of sinners, walked behind, and at last came the motley crowd of Romans interspersed with Eastern converts, Greek monks, English theologians and other foreigners. But the private physician of His Holiness noticed a sudden faintness in Joan, and quickly advised some refreshment. Then the Pope blessed the fields and the harvests, making crosses into all directions. The procession now being over, Joan remounted the mule to return to the Vatican, but, alas, she was not destined to reach it. The heat of the day, the fatigue, the mental worry and remorse, had been too much for her. Nature demanded her rights. Suddenly the Holy Cross had fallen from Joan's hands—the Pope had fainted. Was the head of Christendom possessed by some evil demon? The Bishop of Porto, the greatest authority on exorcism, approached and conjured the evil spirit. Breathlessly the crowd standing round looked at the Pontiff, waiting for the demon to escape, when, suddenly a strange thing happened. The Pope Joan had given birth to a child, prematurely born. Great was the tumult and the consternation. The furious populace and the enemies of the Pope made a rush for the mother and the child ready to throw them into the Tiber, whilst Baldello and his friends endeavoured to pacify the mob by proclaiming a

miracle. But the people were thirsting for blood ; the spirit of their ancestors, who had gloated in the Roman arenas over the gladiators, fighting and bleeding in the dust, over prisoners devoured by wild beasts and tortured for the pleasure of the pagan Roman *plebs*, was suddenly awakened in the Christians of Rome of the ninth century. The people were not in a mood to believe in miracles. The unhappy woman opened her dying eyes, and, casting a glance around her, lifted them to Heaven, reciting the words of the Prophet : " I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair : I hid not my face from shame and spitting."\* In the tumult which ensued Joan was strangled ; her body, however, was buried on the very spot where her death had occurred. It was perhaps the result of the remainder of esteem still lingering in the breasts of the authorities.

Historians of the eleventh century pretended that on that spot where the death of Pope Joan had taken place a chapel had been erected, the traces of which remained until the fifteenth century, whilst some maintain that a marble statue, representing Joan and her child, had been placed there to conserve the memory of the incident for later generations, but when the Reformation had begun to raise its voice against Papacy, the statue had been speedily destroyed. A law had also been passed that henceforth the Popes should never proceed through the

\* Isaiah iv. 6, l. 6.

street where the event dishonouring the Church had happened and that the Pontiff, going in procession from the Church of St. Peter to that of St. John should wend their way through side streets. It was also after the death of Joan that the ceremony of the *chaise perçees* had been introduced—a ceremony which remained in existence until the accession of Pope Leo X. One of these *chaises perçees* was seen by one author in 1590 whilst another gave a minute description of it in 1685.

## CHAPTER IV

### GREGORY VII AND HIS FAVOURITE COUNTESS MATHILDA OF TUSCANY

WE have seen Roman courtesans redeeming to some extent their conduct by a great attachment to their native land ; for they were animated by the thought of national emancipation. And whilst lavishing their 'caresses upon the wearers of the tiara, the Theodoras and Marozias were anxious to subordinate Papacy to the autonomy and independence of Italy. We now come to a Papal favourite of a quite different type. Fascinated by the genius of a great Pope, who had in him the soul of a dictator, instead of that of the humble fisherman on the banks of Genesareth, she devoted herself to the temporal interests of the Church. I am speaking of Mathilda, countess of Tuscany. It was greatly due to her efforts that Papacy acquired that political power over Italy for which the previous Pontiffs had long been fighting. She had been called " *La grande Italienne* " ; but I venture to think that she scarcely deserves that title. Great ? Yes ; in many ways, she was great, but it was not the greatness of Italy she had at heart, but that of the Church and of Papacy. For both she, and her friend, Pope

Hildebrand, had one dream—the supremacy of Papacy over all the nations and the princes of the world. The altar above the throne, the sword of the princes beneath the keys of St. Peter, the forehead of the kings touching the feet of the Pope—such were the ambitious aims animating Pope Gregory VII and Mathilda of Tuscany. Without the authority and consent of the Pontiff of Rome no government should be possible. And any authority which strove to exist independently of the Pope should be shattered like some fragile vase hurled against a mighty rock! "The world," said Gregory, "derives its light from two sources, the sun and the moon, the former symbolising Papacy, the latter the Empire." He has been compared to Napoleon I., "for both," says an Italian historian, "were suffering from the delirium of universal monarchy." "And both," he adds, "were broken in coming into contact with the power of England. Both died in exile, two Titans of tragedy whom a God had broken." Ambitious and inflexible, there was no room for any tender thought in Gregory's heart, so say the upholders of the theory that the originator of the law of celibacy himself had led a life of chastity. His friendship for Mathilda was only of a platonic and mystic nature! That Gregory VII did not truly love Mathilda one might easily admit, but to the Napoleon of the Church all means which could further his plans were permissible, and the love of a woman was an important and mighty factor in the Italy of his day. Mazarin did not love



Anna of Austria, neither did Potemkin love Catherine. They feigned love where love could be of use, and made the woman subservient to their plans. "Gregory VII duped the Countess; he availed himself of her zeal as a devoted partisan of Papacy—but never cherished the woman. Like Napoleon, Hildebrand, too, was a pastmaster in the art of theatrical pose." Some historians, however, have proved, on the strength of contemporary documents, that the relationship of Hildebrand and Mathilda had not been wholly mystic, platonic, and political. I shall relate some episodes of their lives as I have gathered them from various sources.

Mathilda, countess of Tuscany, was the daughter of the Marquess Bonifacius and of Beatrice, a daughter of the Emperor Conrad. Nature had endowed her with qualities which scarcely suited her sex. She was beautiful, but her beauty, more of a dazzling than a gentle nature, appealed to the grosser senses, and never captivated the heart of the admirer. Her appearance was majestic, but it was the majesty and imposing stature of the soldier. And her soul was in perfect harmony with her body. For she was ambitious as she was intrepid, and would be hindered by no obstacles standing in the way of her passions, amorous or otherwise. Hard-hearted and selfish, like every woman conscious of her beauty who does not also couple spiritual culture with physical charm, the countess of Tuscany was destined to play a prominent part in the history of Italy and of Papal Rome. It was

her good fortune to meet a kindred spirit who helped her to realise her dreams of ambition and to satisfy her unbridled passions. Mathilda was still very young when her parents married her much against her will to Goffredo il Gobbo the hunchback but neither the marriage bond in general nor the husband chosen for her in particular pleased the tastes of the impulsive Countess. Rome with her life of vice and libertinage with her splendour and luxury attracted her and she soon thought of some pretext upon which to annul her marriage. It is characteristic of the woman and of her hypocrisy and cynicism that she was pleading the very pretext which was in direct contradiction with her nature. Like Christine of Sweden another noble hypocrite Countess Mathilda pretended that Heaven and nature did not intend her for matrimonial life. Hers was the temperament of a holy vestal of a noble nun desiring no other love but that of the Church and no other bridegroom than Christ! The ardent kisses and love demonstrations of a mere man were appalling to her! And the society of Europe of the twelfth century believed her. Deaf to the entreaties of her husband and unmoved by the remonstrances of her family she left Goffredo and went to Rome where she soon became one of the greatest ladies at the Papal Court. Her husband who was of a chivalrous but impulsive nature henceforth had a deep hatred for Papacy and Rome. He retired to the Court of Lorraine and afterwards embraced the cause of

intent upon organising his theocracy—the supremacy of the tiara over the crown, of the spiritual power over the temporal, and in making the kingdoms of Europe vassals of the Court of Rome. The Pope was infallible, and the Infallible is the ruler of the world, like Napoleon, Gregory constituted himself the centre of the world, the pivot round which the universe should revolve. But the Infallible was clear-sighted enough to perceive that he required co-workers. A woman like the rich and mighty Countess of Tuscany was an invaluable acquisition to his cause, a precious instrument in his hands. But once more the woman duped the man—she proved stronger—and Mathilda, like many of her sex, was an artist in ruling; she ruled, pretending all the time to be ruled. The Infallible, the tyrant, became submissive, the ruler a subject of the imperious woman. He who was supposed to possess the power of unlocking the gates of Heaven, and of unchaining all bonds, became enchained himself by the shackles of love. The Pope was in love! Mathilda of Tuscany with her dazzling appearance, her gleaming flesh, her glorious, opulent beauty, had captivated the heart of Hildebrand. The proud monk who was wont to command sovereigns and mighty warriors was only too happy to obey the woman he loved. The master of Christendom became the slave of the Tuscan Countess. They had a great deal in common, these two ambitious souls, who were great in many ways, and who in a measure compel our

admiration. Their physical attraction was strengthened by a bond of deep sympathy, making their union almost indissoluble. The ambitious Mathilda thought herself mistress not only of the Pope but of Europe. The idea of a rival never entered her mind—and her sense of safety was perhaps the cause of her undoing. Public opinion in Italy was indignant at the conduct of Mathilda, and it was especially the family of her husband who vented their wrath very loudly. In order to silence her relations, she is said to have invited a niece of her husband, a girl of the name of Theodrine, to come to Rome, promising to marry her advantageously.

Theodrine's mother, a very ambitious woman, was delighted to send her daughter to the Eternal City, where the protection of such a powerful relative as her aunt Mathilda would soon help her to make a brilliant match. In her native Tuscany the family had given Theodrine a description of her aunt far from flattering; and she was therefore astonished and agreeably surprised at the kindness and treatment she met on her arrival in Rome. Theodrine was only eighteen, and her appearance was as unlike that of her aunt as her entire nature and temperament were different from those of Mathilda. She possessed more grace and fascination than majestic beauty. And what was more, she added culture and perfection of mind to her delicate physical appearance. All those who came within the magic circle of her personal charm

fell under its influence. Theodorine's heart had already been won by one of the handsomest princes in Italy, Hippolyte, Marquess of Arimini—and his advances had been accepted not only by the loving girl, but also by her ambitious mother. The young prince soon joined his fiancée in Rome.

But the Pope saw Theodorine and forgot the charms of the elder and more mature woman. The grace and unpretentious beauty of the niece had captivated the heart of the Sovereign-Pontiff, he began to think of means how to keep her near him without raising the suspicion of the passionate aunt. Gregory gave brilliant receptions and festivities in his Palace of the Lateran, and Theodorine was the centre of the many pleasures and amusements. But alas! whilst the heart of Hildebrand was being more and more consumed, the more frequently he came into contact with the fresh beauty of the Tuscan girl, the latter only felt contempt for the Pope. She found the licentiousness and voluptuousness reigning at the Court of Rome scandalous, and the attitude of the Pontiff hardly in accordance with his dignity. The girl loved the Prince of Arimini and her judgment of the Pope was not warped by any affection for him. To her he was an elderly man disgracing his holy office and making a fool of himself for the love of a woman. And such was Theodorine's indignation and contempt that she did not hesitate to express her views to her aunt in undisguised and forcible language.

'His Holiness' she said, "would be more in his

place in the whirl of wordly pleasures, anywhere, indeed, but on the throne of St. Peter, which ought to be the seat of wisdom, benevolence, and modesty. I am more than scandalised at his conduct ; and the head of Christianity is scarcely superior to any mean and low charlatan who is trading on the stupidity and folly of the ignorant masses in the open squares and market-places "

" Child," replied the aunt, " you use daring language with regard to him who is all-powerful. You are too young to criticise the actions of His Holiness, whom all Christendom is serving and worshipping, and who has the power to open the gates of Heaven to the most inveterate sinners "

" It is true, madam," replied the girl " I am very young, but if I have openly expressed my opinion to you, it is based upon my firm conviction that you, too, in your heart of hearts, have only a poor respect for His Holiness, whose attitude in private is so unholy as to shock and surprise a right-minded Christian and a decent-thinking woman.

" The respect I had for the Pope—whom I supposed to be conscientiously fulfilling the duties of his holy office—is now gone," added the girl with a flash of indignation

" I have brought you to Rome," coldly replied Countess Matilda, " in order to teach you, mould and fashion your young mind ; but it seems to me that you know far more than His Holiness and myself. We shall do best to take lessons from you," she concluded with an ironic smile.

"I wonder, my dear, where you learned all your wisdom and who it is who is speaking through your mouth. Is it by chance the Prince of Arimini who is endeavouring to enlighten you?"

"I am only guided by my common sense and am only trusting my own judgment," was the proud rejoinder.

"Then you have well employed your eighteen summers—and for one so young you reason admirably. But go to bed, child, and for the future remember that the Pontiffs of Rome are above criticism above everything and everybody, and woe unto those who dare to find fault with their actions and blame their conduct. The Pope can do no wrong."

"I may be compelled to silence," said Theodoric, "but no one can take away from me the liberty of thinking as I choose."

The Countess was not prepared to find such independence of thought in her niece. She had expected a child whose character and mind she would easily mould and shape, and whose actions and conduct she would make subservient to her own will. But instead of a wax doll, who would have proved a useful instrument in her hands, she suddenly found herself confronted with a personality who was quite a match for herself and whose criticisms being only too just, were not without some danger. She could send her back to Tuscany, but before doing so she decided to speak to His Holiness confidentially and to advise him to be on his guard in the presence of her niece.

Whilst these intrigues were going on within the walls of the Lateran, a fierce fight was raging outside Italy. The war between Henry, the German Emperor, and the Pope was being waged. Papacy and Empire had entered into that long struggle for supremacy which was to last for centuries. The successors of Charlemagne and the inheritors of St. Peter were each claiming the rule of the world. For some time the Pope had spit torrents of venom against the rebellious Henry IV, and at last the head of Christendom hurled his *anathema*, excommunicating the disobedient sovereign. The former monk ordered the German Emperor to appear before the papal throne in Rome, and when the inheritor of the succession of Charlemagne disobeyed, he was excommunicated, deprived of his Imperial dignities, and his crown bestowed upon the Duke of Swabia. Henry was ultimately obliged to travel to Canossa, there to do penance and to humiliate himself before the proud ruler on the throne of St. Peter.

Accompanied by a small retinue of his faithful friends, the Emperor came to Canossa, where the Pontiff was passing his time with Countess Mathilda. For three days the wearer of the crown of Charlemagne, clad in the long shirt of a sinner, bare-headed and bare-footed, remained exposed to the rigours of a severe winter before the gates of the castle, without being admitted into the presence of the Son of the Carpenter. His apostolic serenity was not moved, in spite of the tears and prayers of all present at the castle.



Gregory VII was firm in his decision—he knew that he was laying the foundation of the greatness of the Church. He was a ruler anxious for the welfare of his dynasty and therefore remained implacable in his endeavour to crush the enemy. And whilst on the cold winter night of December the Emperor was outside the Vicar of Christ in company of his favourite was enjoying the aspect of his humiliated opponent. At last when he had sufficiently humbled his Imperial enemy the Pontiff pretended to give way to the prayers of Countess Mathilda. Gregory VII was satisfied. Had he not humiliated to the dust the Imperial power and emancipated the Holy See from its ancient obedience and submission to the Carolingian and Frankish Cæsars? The reign of the theocracy had been inaugurated—the supremacy of the Church centred in Papacy had been established.

Great festivities were given at the Papal palace at Rome to solemnise this great event—the triumph of the Church. For was not Gregory VII the king of kings and did not emperors tremble before him and quake before his wrath? The beautiful ladies of Italy graced the banquet and the ball and some stranger unacquainted with the life at the Court of Rome would have fancied himself at one of the banquets in the days of the pagan Emperors rather than in the abode of the head of Christendom.

And whilst festivities and love-scenes were being witnessed within the walls of the Papal palace Europe was astir with great events. Henry IV,

Emperor of the Holy German Empire, whom the proud Pontiff had excommunicated and humbled to the dust, had sworn revenge. He was now gathering a great force to lead against Rome. If the Pope had deprived him of the Imperial crown, giving it to Duke Rudolph, Henry in his turn declared Gregory an Antichrist and appointed Guibert, Bishop of Ravenna, head of Christendom, under the name of Clement III.

The armies of Henry and of the Duke of Swabia met on the banks of the Elster in Saxony. Rudolph fell on the battlefield, and the victorious Imperial troops, under the command of Henry's son, invaded Italy, defeating the soldiers of Countess Mathilda at Volta near Mantua.

In his distress the Pontiff turned to Mathilda, who had not only been his favourite but his trusted adviser on former occasions. For a moment he had forgotten the sweet beauty of the obstinate girl, and sought the company of the mature woman, whose intelligence was a match for and even superior to his own, and he was not disappointed, for he found his former friend ready for the emergency. She would yet humble the faithless Henry. She herself would lead the Roman armies against the enemy. One condition, however, she stipulated—Prince Hippolyte should accompany her in her martial expedition. Countess Mathilda had conceived a great liking for the lover of her niece, a liking which soon changed into an ardent love.

"You will guard Rome and—Theodorine," she

observed ' whilst I will court the dangers of the battlefield and endeavour to earn the title of Heroine if I have lost the honour of your Holiness's favour

Gregory consented to her plan With feverish haste the preparations for war were carried out and the Countess was looked upon by the Church as a guardian angel come down to protect Rome the Pope and the Holy Church in a moment of sore distress Prince Hippolyte received an honourable position and was burning with a noble zeal to render service to the holy cause and to make his name famous for Theodora's sake as well as for his own His *fiancée* made the parting a little heavy

You are running to court danger she said but you will find it more difficult and fraught with greater risks to subdue the Imperial forces and conquer the Empire than you have had in conquering my heart And is it only the desire for glory and brilliant feats of arm that is animating your martial zeal or the pleasure of obeying Mathilda?

Would you like to see me a coward and refuse to face danger when the voice of duty is calling? No you will admit that such an attitude and conduct would not be worthy of your lover If I have any hesitation to part it is my conviction that the cause of the Emperor is a more just one than that of Hildebrand and I would sooner join the armies of the former than protect the latter

"Would you have the necessary courage," the girl maliciously inquired, "to wage war against the Countess and meet her in mortal combat? No, no," she added quickly, "I require no answer; I know that your heart belongs to me, but it would be dishonourable for you now to abandon the Pope. Heaven only knows he does not deserve any consideration, but he has done you no harm and you have pledged your word. Go, my friend, with the Roman army, and remember that when the Countess—who has done her best to win your heart—becomes indifferent to you, I shall remain faithful to my love. The Papal crown and the wrath of the ambitious priest will never tear your image from my heart. And as for the beauty of Mathilda, it is too artificial, and owes too much to cosmetics to rouse my fear."

In the meantime, whilst the Emperor, who had proclaimed Guilbert Pope under the name of Clement III, was preparing his revenge and burning with a desire to depose his enemy and expel Hildebrand from Italy, his own blood rose against him. Henry V, the son of Henry IV, took up arms against his father. Europe was torn by strife, and witnessed many harrowing scenes, the result of a devastating war. Passions were let loose in the hearts of men, brother fought against brother, and son against father. In the midst of the scenery of war and devastation, bloodshed and destruction, Countess Mathilda in camp did not forget her love. In vain, however, did she storm the heart of the

Prince And when at last he emphatically scorned her love it changed into mortal hatred and she planned his death Several times she gave orders to destroy him but always cancelled them Her husband having died in the meantime Mathilda was free and offered her hand and her immense wealth to Hippolyte but he refused her offer

And while the god of love failed to smile upon Countess Mathilda the god of war showed no greater favour to him who was the head of the religion of peace The Papal armies were beaten Henry had achieved an important victory and was marching his soldiers into Rome Gregory the son of the Carpenter who had ruled like an Eastern potentate was compelled to flee from the city on the banks of the Tiber and to seek refuge in Salerno In vain did he ask Heaven why the god of battles the God of Moses and of Joshua had not procured victory to the head of Christendom to the anointed of the Lord The Pope died in obscurity an exile full of rage and remorse baffled in love and ambition alike

Hippolyte Prince of Arimin returned to his beloved and soon married her whilst the Countess who had carried off several splendid victories wept over her laurels She outlived Gregory by many years and although mortified at her failure to gain the heart of the Prince of Arimin she continued to play a prominent part in Italian politics and the affairs of the Church She was responsible for the election of the Popes Victor III and Urban II And

when Victor III the pious abbot of Monte-Cassino, had fled from Rome, Mathilda, like a Jeanne d'Arc at the head of her armies, brought him back to the Eternal City. On her death-bed—she died in 1115 at the age of sixty-nine—she bequeathed unto the Holy See the immense wealth she had accumulated by robbing the Church during her days of power. She was a good Catholic after all, and made restitution.

## CHAPTER V

### PAPACY AT AVIGNON

#### POPE CLEMENT VI AND JOANNA OF NAPLES

POPE GREGORY X seems to have led a more decent life than his predecessors, for it is related of him that he deprived the Bishop of Liège of his post, because this prelate kept several concubines some of them also nuns, and squandered the wealth of the Church upon his little family, consisting of sixty-three children! This Bishop was soon afterwards assassinated by a Flemish knight, who thus avenged the honours of his daughters whom the prelate had abducted. The Pope found the offended father's wrath justified and did not even excommunicate the assassin. On the contrary, however, Pope Nicholas III had a numerous family, whom he appointed to the most lucrative posts in the Church. Two of his sons—whom he called his nephews—he intended to raise to the dignity of princes one as the Duke of Tuscany and the other as King of Lombardy. Death, however, prevented him from carrying out his designs. Pope Clement IV had two daughters, one of them entered the monastery, whilst the other married.

The period, however, which is as rich in Papal

intrigues and love affairs as was the tenth century, is that which is known as the Babylonian captivity of the Popes, when the Holy See was transferred from the Eternal City to Avignon.

Avignon in those days resembled the Versailles of the Pompadours and the Dubarrys—and many were such Pompadours and Dubarrys who ruled at the Court of the Pontiffs.

Among the many reasons which had induced Bertrand de Goth, as Pope Clement V, to transfer the Papal residence to Avignon was his love for the beautiful Comtesse de Périgord, daughter of the Comte de Foix. Baluzius and Mézeray, and especially contemporary authors like the poet Petrarch and Nicholas Clamengis, give minute descriptions of the lives of the Popes and of the Court of Avignon.

"With the entry of the Papal Court in France," writes Clamengis, "corruption, immorality, and debauchery entered the country. The Holy See taught the French people all sorts of crimes, of excesses, and luxury, not to forget the art of poison. Such is the blessing which the holy fathers are bringing, a blessing which is best of all noticeable in holy Rome itself." Petrarch called Avignon the modern Babylon on the banks of the Rhône. "All that people say of the ancient city of Babylon is nought compared to Avignon, for here one sees the personification of that debauchery and immorality related in ancient myths and legends of the gods of pagan antiquity.



As soon as the Popes had established their court at Avignon they introduced an absolutely regal train. For a short time only they resided in the Dominican cloister but already Clement V laid the foundations of the vast Papal palace which has remained until the present day a monument of the so-called Babylonian captivity of Papacy. If stones could speak what tales these gigantic walls could unfold these numerous suites of apartments with towers and fortresses and subterranean corridors! The aspect of this labyrinth of rooms involuntarily recalls to our mind the life of medieval Princes with their crimes and their passions and our imagination peoples these Papal apartments with warriors and court ladies à la Versailles. One may almost hear the stealthy tread of a noble lady hurrying along the silent corridors and disappearing—through a secret passage leading to a hidden door straight into the bedchamber of the ruler on the throne of St. Peter.

It was in this gigantic princely palace that the Popes of Avignon dwelt. They were not gloomy scholars pondering over bulky volumes of ancient lore priests full of contempt for the frivolities and pleasures of earthly life or anchorites torturing their bodies mercilessly preparing themselves for the kingdom of Heaven. They were princes of the world clinging to life and its pleasures who lived and loved and passed their lives in a court of luxury and pomp surrounded by courtiers and beautiful women!

Numerous were the intrigues and love affairs at this Papal court of Avignon. Let us hear the descriptions of Petrarch and others. Clement VI had raised Avignon to an intellectual centre, and this Babylon on the banks of the Rhône became the seat of Provençal poetry. Artists were summoned from Italy to decorate the palace of the Popes. But hand in hand with this brilliance, intellectual and artistic, went the debauchery, the excesses, the gay licence of Provence and the corruptions of the priests—the wickedness of the inhabitants and the perfidy of the rulers. Clement had gathered in his palace poets and artists, the flower of erudition and of learning, but above all, the flowers of beauty and of grace—the handsomest women of gay Provence and of the south of France.

Gallant dames and love-sick nuns, cardinals, knights, and joyous priests formed a motley crowd, surging in the spacious halls of His Holiness, who adored the feasts and court banquets. And those splendid banquets—which Clement VI often gave in his palace—had become so famous that they were known under the name of the Clementine. They could rival in luxury and splendour those of bacchanalian Rome. The Queen of these feasts was the beautiful Comtesse de Turenne, who for many years was the all-powerful favourite of His Holiness, and kept the head of Christendom in the net of her charms. The Pontifical Court had become the temple where the goddess once issued from the foam-crested waves ruled supreme.

Christian piety and modesty covered their faces and retired in confusion ! On day when Pope Clement was presiding at a council of cardinals a letter was handed to His Holiness. It was addressed by the devil to his brother Clement. The doings of every one of the Cardinals and of the Pope himself were enumerated and all were invited to become worthy of the favour of Lucifer by continuing in the path they had chosen.

In his *lettres au connue* Petrarch gives the following description of the Court of Avignon. You find there the terrible Nimrod Semiramis armed the inexorable Minos Rhadamanthus Cerberus, Proserpina the beloved of the bull the Minotaur—the scandalous monument of the most infamous amours. Confusion darkness and horror vice and crime dwell within these precincts. I am only describing unto you what I have seen with my own eyes. I know from experience that you can find here neither piety nor charity neither faith nor respect or fear of God nothing sacred and nothing human. Friendship decency candour are absolutely unknown here.

The hope for a future life is looked upon as a vain illusion—what is being related about hell as a mere fable. The resurrection of the flesh the end of the world in Jesus Christ supreme and absolute judge is counted among puerile inventions. Love of truth is considered madness haughty boorishness decency a shameful stupidity Licentiousness on the contrary is considered greatness of soul whilst

native land I shall not dwell upon that cruel insult by which the offended husbands are being compelled to receive in their houses their wives who had been prostituted especially when they carry under their breasts the fruit of the criminal love. Immediately after child birth the wife is taken back by the lover. The insult only takes an end with the disgust of the lover for the mistress.

Jerome Squarciafico the biographer of Petrarch relates the following episode. Benedict XII son and successor of Pope John XXII was seated on the Papal throne at Avignon. He had cast his eyes upon the sister of the poet the noble Selvaggia famed for her extraordinary beauty. Used as the clerics were to find no resistance among the beauties of the Court only too willing to listen to the amorous declarations of the Holy Father Benedict felt sure of success. Cynically the Vicar of Christ sent for the poet asking him to name the price of the favours of his sister. The Holy Father was a born prince and ready to pry generously and had not the previous Pope amassed immense wealth in the service of the Church which the head of Christendom could now dispose of as he pleased? Petrarch was also offered a cardinal's hat as reward for his services. With indignation the poet refused to accept the ignoble bargain telling the Pope that never would he don the purple on such conditions but would consider it as an abomination! Such audacity could not go unpunished. The offended Pontiff denounced Petrarch as an heretic to the

sacred office of the Inquisition. Had he not dared to contradict the Holy Father and to thwart him in his desires? Crime enough to be judged by the tribunal of the Inquisition, who knew only one sentence—death. Petrarch escaped from Avignon, and thus saved his life. Before leaving he recommended his brother to watch over their sister Selvaggia, and her honour. The poet's younger brother, however, who seems to have been less scrupulous, allowed himself to be tempted by the wealth offered to him by the Holy Father for the favours of the beautiful maiden. One night, therefore, the girl, who was only sixteen, was suddenly seized in her sleep and carried to the palace of Avignon and into the apartments of the Pope, like some Circassian slave into the harem of the Turkish Sultan. When Selvaggia realised the danger that threatened her, she fell on her knees imploring the pity of the Pope. Her despair and her tears only increased the passion of Benedict, and when his persuasions proved of no avail—and even his threats of eternal damnation futile with the obstinate child—he had recourse to force. "*Mich'reizt deine schone Gestalt und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt*"

The brother afterwards regretted his treacherous action, and having succeeded in marrying his sister to some indulgent husband, promising to overlook the sin of the Pope, he retired into a monastery to repent of his transgressions. John XXIII was accused of many crimes by the Council of Constance

in 1415 Theodore de Niem a contemporary bishop enumerates seventy crimes of which this Pontiff was accused and one of them was the following John had appointed a certain bishop as visitor of the convents of the nuns but in reality this holy officer was only a purveyor of His Holiness And the nuns who had the good fortune of being sanctified by the love of the Pontiff were afterwards sure of a reward Many ladies who have charmed a monarch or a prince have been raised to the ranks of aristocracy and numerous are the countesses and baronesses whose only claim to nobility is their good fortune to have excited the passion of some king It was therefore befitting that a Sovereign Pontiff should nominate his favourites abbesses and mothers superior!

The following story is characteristic of the state of Papacy in Avignon It is related by Boccaccio

A rich Jew of Marseilles had many friends among the Christians of the town These were anxious to convert the son of Israel to Christianity Many a time the Christians discussed with the Jew the superiority of their religion they were anxious to make him embrace Christianity but all their efforts proved futile I shall live and die in the faith of my ancestors the Jew constantly replied Once however he fell ill and at once his Christian friends who had been visiting him assiduously pointed out to him the advisability of his conversion What a pity it would be they said were you not to meet your friends in the next world for as a Jew you

would of course not be admitted into Paradise by St. Peter, but would have to go to some other place." Pressed by his well-meaning friends, the Jew at last promised to give the matter his mature consideration, and as soon as he got well to come to a decision. When he became convalescent he indeed remembered the promise he had given his friends and announced his intention to go to Avignon, the seat of the Pope. "There," he said, "in the immediate proximity of the Holy Father, the representative of Christendom, the Vicar of Christ, the successor of St. Peter, I shall study Christianity and convince myself of its truth." Hearing such words of the Jew, his Christian friends lost heart, for they felt sure that his conversion would never take place. Well they knew what life the Pope and prelates were leading at Avignon, and the example they set would scarcely be such as to convince that unbeliever of the purity of Christianity and of the superiority of the doctrines taught by the Roman Church. They did their best to dissuade the Jew from his intended visit, but it was all in vain. "Are there not learned men in Marseilles," they argued, "quite capable of instructing you in the mysteries of Christian teaching, to answer all your questions and to set your doubts at rest?" But the Jew remained firm. He had made up his mind to go to Avignon, and to Avignon he went. His Christian friends now despaired of the conversion of the Jew; and great was their grief, as they had given up all hopes of ever meeting their

friend in the next world. They shuddered at the thought of the debaucheries and abominations which the Jew would witness at the seat of the Pontiffs. With heavy hearts they awaited his return. After an absence of a few months the Jew returned to Mar-eilles, and, to the great astonishment of his friends, he declared unto them that he was now ready to embrace Christianity and to undergo baptism. In amazement his friends listened to his words, hardly daring to inquire after the real motives which prompted his decision. A few days had elapsed and their curiosity got the better of them. "How is it," they asked, "that in spite of your visit to Avignon, which ought to have filled you with loathing for the Roman Church, you have nevertheless decided to become a Christian?" "My dear friends," replied the Jew, "you do not understand the psychology which prompts the convert to abandon one religion and embrace another. It is true, in Avignon I saw nought but abomination, all the vices and excesses of the world. The nuns are courtesans, and the monks *courteurs*, the Pope and the Cardinals are Don Juans and are leading lives of debauchery.—The Papal palace appeared to me to be a temple dedicated to the pagan goddesses of antiquity, to Venus and Astarte, and not to the Prophet of Nazareth. With loathing and disgust I turned from all that I witnessed. But suddenly a thought occurred to me! How sublime, after all, must be the doctrine taught by Christ; how noble and full of strength His teaching



was indeed a *grand seigneur* "No sovereign," writes his biographer "exceeded him in expenditure, nor bestowed his gifts and favours with more generosity." His furniture was sumptuous, his table covered with dainty dishes, and his stud consisted of the finest horses that could be procured. His predilection for the society of ladies was great, and his Pontifical residence was open to the fair sex *at all sorts of hours*. And indeed at Avignon, where the beautiful eyes of Laura, the beloved of Petrarch, had lit that famous fire in the heart of the poet on Good Friday, many a knight, prince, or prelate, lost his heart to one of the beauties who thronged the Court. They flocked there to take part in the fêtes and the pleasures, to seek adventures of all sorts, or to restore their fortunes by love intrigues or by alliances—for which at such a brilliant Court there were many opportunities.

But if the ladies of quality were admitted at all times into the apartments of the Pope—like the *belles dames* at the Court of Louis XV, Cicely de Comminges, Comtesse de Turenne, kept the Pontiff for a long time under her sway. Clement was one of the most gentle sovereigns of his century, and it was easy for an imperious beauty like Cicely de Comminges to exercise absolute sway over him. The Pontiff says Giovanni Villani never decided any important matter without previously asking her advice. She was to him what La Maintenon was to Louis XIV, what the Pompadour was to Louis XV, and what Donna Olimpia was to Inno-

cent X. Ecclesiastical writers and white-washers of the Popes maintain that Clement VI and the Comtesse de Turenne have been grossly maligned, and that their relationship was somewhat similar to that of St. Francis de Sales and Madame Chantal. All historians, however, admit that this Papal favourite amassed great wealth under the pontificate of her protector, that her greed and her avidity knew no bounds, and that she availed herself of her power to receive money from all those who solicited favours or offices from the Holy Father. She became the channel of Papal favours, and loaded her friends and relations with wealth and honours. Clement VI was a child of his age, of an age of chivalry, gallantry, and poesy. And in spite of stirring events, of heresies and schisms, of feudal, civil, and foreign wars, the spirit of this chivalry spread its wings and followed its course. Society ladies and noble dames, married and unmarried, had adopted the fashion of a *Cicisbeo* as a legitimate accessory of their high rank. For a noble lady to lack a knight attached to her service was equivalent to lacking in *bon ton*. Troubadours and minstrels visited the castles of the nobles, sang in ballads the charms of their ladies, and the latter accorded to them every privilege which a woman can grant to her lover. The debauchery of the age had above all found a centre in Avignon, where the gold of the world poured on every side, where seductive courtesans exercised the power of their charms upon unmarried cardinals and prelates, where nuns,

behind mysterious cloister walls, beguiled their time not with fasting and prayer!

The Pontifical government of the Avignon period was not a cruel régime. Intellectual culture and humanism prevailed in the palace of the Popes—the walls of which testify to this very day of the terrible and crushing power of Papacy in the fourteenth century. Nearly all the Popes who resided at Avignon were men of erudition and learning, scholars, men of the world—and who encouraged the *gay Saber*, the poetry of the troubadours and the art of the dawning Renaissance. Petrarch and Giotto found noble patrons in the Sovereign Pontiffs on the banks of the windy Rhone. These rulers on the throne of St. Peter were also politicians, whose fanaticism was exercised against Philip le Bel and Louis of Bavaria rather than against heretics. No doubt heresy formed part and parcel of the policy of those days—just as socialism, nihilism, anarchism constitute so many items in the political programme of the twentieth century and to suppress which it is deemed the duty of the reigning powers. Every authority rules and asserts its powers by availing itself of the means it has at hand. In those centuries of barbarism, in that night of mediævalism lit only by the glaring flames of the burning stakes, it may have been a kindness on the part of the Pontiffs to hide from public view the human sacrifices and holocausts—a policy to which they thought themselves condemned by a law of terror. Everything took place in the interior of the palace,

where heretics were tortured and burned ; but the people knew little or nothing of what was happening, guessing perhaps that an execution had taken place from the thick smoke coming out from a chimney of one of the towers. Later on in Spain the Inquisition changed its tactics. It turned the executions into public festivals, and invited the populace to witness the burning of heretics—which in Avignon took place only behind closed doors. The Popes were scholars and gentlemen ; and is it so difficult to imagine these sovereigns living peacefully in their palace—talking theology with the cardinals, *gay Saber* with troubadours and fair dames, whilst beneath—within the walls of the very palace—in a miserable casemate some one is agonising, is being tortured to death, because he had dared to think ? The modern student and the Christian of Western Europe of the twentieth century unhesitatingly make the sweeping remark : They were cruel tyrants, those powerful Pontiffs—barbarians and savages. But would it not be easy to draw a parallel between the dungeons of the fourteenth century on the banks of the Rhône and those of the twentieth on the banks of the Neva ? Whilst the Tsar of All the Russias is graciously smiling and honouring with his august presence some brilliant ball at the Winter Palace—not far away, in the miserable casemates of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, some delicate girl is being slowly tortured to death, because *she* has dared to think ! How many of us, however, feel indignant at the mere

assertion that the ruler of Russia is a savage. In culture and artistic appreciation the Sovereign-Pontiffs, contemporaries of Boccaccio and Petrarch, of Giotto and Cimabué, residing at Avignon, would certainly outshine many a sovereign of Europe who has graced the annals of history. And sovereigns they were, those Vicars of Christ, living in the fourteenth century—sovereigns of a powerful empire, sovereigns with all their faults and all their virtues. They were Frenchmen, they were—for the most part—scions of noble, aristocratic, and princely families, and they lived in the fourteenth century—in the midst of poetic Provence—in an age of chivalry, knight-errants, and love. For the fourteenth century was an age of love *par excellence*. The very atmosphere of Avignon seems to have been fraught with love. In the church of St. Clare at Avignon—was it on a Good Friday or on an Easter Monday?—a young man and a young woman met. They exchanged a glance, and this glance gave birth to a flame which was destined to be deified and sung through centuries. The young man was Petrarch, the young maid Laura de Noves.

Their story, like that of Romeo and Juliet, began with a mutual and instantaneous vibration which fused into one, and for eternity, two hearts, strangers until that moment. That famous love affair, which may now appear only affectation and imagination, nevertheless reflects faithfully the truth of the period, the romantic idea of the age, the conception of love. And the spirit of the age,

the spirit of Provence—where the march of civilisation had not been interrupted ever since the days of the Romans and the Greeks—had penetrated into the palace of the Popes. The residence of the successors of St Peter had become a large *caravansérail*, where profane pleasure entered freely. From Gascony and Languedoc the nobility hastened to the fêtes offered by the Papacy; and a motley crowd of merchants and mad virgins, of Italian refugees and adventurers of all sorts and conditions, filled the narrow streets. And Avignon, in brilliancy and laxity of morals, began to resemble Babylon of old—lacking nothing, not even the daughters of Israel. But the latter neither wept nor sighed when they sat by the waters of the Rhône. The Church offered so many advantages in those days; she was the infallible means, the direct road leading to power, honour, and—pleasure; to wealth and consideration. And hence the Church—and especially the Papal Court—was full of men and women whose mode of life, whose tendencies and aspirations were far from holy.

Clement VI was, so to speak, the forerunner of those Popes of the fifteenth century who prepared the way for the Renaissance. Clement liked to recall memories of pagan times, and frequently repeated the words of a Roman Emperor, "No one must withdraw displeased from the presence of the Prince."

While Clement VI saw himself threatened with the loss of his authority in Rome, events in Naples

gained for him the sovereignty of Avignon. It was sold to the Holy See by that beautiful Queen Joanna of Naples whom historians have often compared to Mary Queen of Scots. Joanna of Naples plays an important part in the history of Papacy for not only did she lay the foundation of the Papal suzerainty in Provence but she became a favourite of two Sovereign Pontiffs.

Contemporary historians say that like the wife of Claudius this Princess sought the love and caresses of her meanest servants. The indifference which she at first experienced for her husband had been changed into antipathy and soon into deep hatred stured and stimulated by political factions and jealousy. Naples was in a state of fermentation and tragical events were threatening. Soon the Prince Andrew was to fall by the hand of the assassin Petrarchi who had visited Naples at that period exclaims "O God! How Naples is to be pitied! One almost fails to recognise this city. Religion faith and truth seem to have fled her walls one would imagine oneself to be at Memphis Babylon or Mecca! In the place of King Robert so good so pious so just there rules a little monk barefooted with shorn crown cleanshaven covered in a dirty cloak bent by hypocrisy rather than by years steeped in debauchery proud of his poverty more even than of the wealth he has accumulated. It is he—the little Friar Robert—who is holding the reins of government—His cruelty and his debaucheries surpass those of Denis Agathocles and Phalaris.

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"This monster, which one can hardly contemplate without a feeling of horror, oppresses the weak and despises the mighty ones; he treads under foot justice and treats the two Queens with the utmost insolence. Court and town tremble before him, and a sad silence prevails in all assemblies at Naples. In the interior of the houses people are talking in whispers, the slightest gesture being punished like a crime—one scarcely dares to think."

And whilst the hatred of the Queen for her husband increased, whilst her love intrigue with her cousin, Louis de Taranto, became an open secret at the Court, the friends of her lover decided to turn to the latter's benefit the Queen's inclination for a gallant life. It was decided to spare no means so as to get rid of Prince Andrew and of Friar Robert, and rush the Queen into a marriage with her cousin and lover. An assassination—in the interests of court policy—was only a trifling matter in the days of the Italian Renaissance. Prince Andrew had to go, the only question being how he was to meet his doom. A Neapolitan chronicler relates that one evening the whole Court being assembled, Queen Joanna, whether to avoid the glances of her courtiers or simply to seek distraction, took out of her work-basket some threads of gold and silver and started plaiting a beautiful belt. Her consort approached and inquired whether this was intended for a girdle or a sword-belt. Joanna was silent for a while—then, looking her spouse straight in the face, she replied with a mocking laugh: "This belt is to



strangle you, sire!" and indeed September 18, 1345, witnessed a terrible catastrophe. The Court was at Aversa, Naples being intolerable during the hot summer months. The royal suite was occupying apartments in the Celestine convent of San Pietro a Majella. The town of Aversa is situated between Capua and the capital, in the district known as the "happy campania." There was nothing unusual for the Court to go to this delightful summer resort, for the monarchs were in the habit of annually leaving their capital and seeking relaxation in one of their summer residences, where woods and forests, parks and chases offered them delightful diversions. Here they spent a few weeks far from the turmoil of the Court. On the fatal night the Court had already retired, the guards of the Prince were sunk in sleep, and the black robed monks enjoying a short repose before starting their matins. It was past midnight when one of the Queen's maids, Mabrice di Pace, quietly entered the royal bedchamber and informed Andrew that a courier from Friar Robert had just arrived and wished to speak to him on matters of importance which brooked no delay. Unsuspectingly the Prince quickly rose and proceeded to the place where the supposed courier was waiting. Scarcely had he left the chamber when the door was quickly bolted, the Prince seized, gagged with a glove, and strangled.

He was dragged forward to the balcony of the gallery, where they hanged him over the garden.

Some of the conspirators are supposed to have pulled the feet of the quivering, dangling body from below, so as to hasten death. It seems that the nurse of Andrew, or, according to others, a Hungarian waiting-maid, who slept in one of the apartments under the balcony, was suddenly awakened by the noise, and seeing and hearing what was happening raised the alarm. Her loud cries of murder rang through the palace, and the assassins, leaving the corpse, quickly dispersed. At the testimony of this Hungarian, Joanna was accused of the murder. Some contemporary writers, having depicted her as a woman governed by insatiable passions, passing from the arms of her *amant attiré* into those of numerous other courtiers, maintain that she herself was the instigator of the crime. Without endeavouring to enter fully into this question—the episode being a side-issue of our story—one may, however, remark *en passant* that if Joanna were guilty of connivance in the murder of her husband, she was not the only princess in history who got rid of her husband with the help of her devoted friends. And is it such an unique event in the history of criminology—a woman having her husband assassinated by her lover—as to declare Joanna's participation in the assassination of Andrew absolutely impossible?

Some authors go so far as to maintain that Joanna herself, with the help of her devoted followers and lovers, had strangled the Prince with the belt she herself had made, and that the next morning it was

announced in Naples that unknown assassins had committed the foul deed. No one dared to investigate the details of the catastrophe.

Muratori, the best authority on the history of Italy, says that it would be easier to make the face of a negro white than to whitewash Queen Joanna and to disculpate her of the murder of her husband.

And it seems almost improbable to imagine that the Italian Messalina was absolutely ignorant of the conspiracy which was planned on the threshold of her apartments—a conspiracy in which her friends and her lover were the principal actors. Had they dared to carry out their plans without being sure at least of the silent consent of the Queen? The Pontiff Clement VI seems to have been inclined—if not openly to accuse Joanna—at least to attribute some importance to the grave suspicions attached to her person. Her conduct after the murder of her husband increased the suspicions. Joanna protected the assassins and seems to have manifested no signs of grief at the death of Prince Andrew and public opinion now openly accused the Queen of the murder.

Joanna dispatched messengers to the King of Hungary and to the Pope, conveying the sad news. In her letter to Louis of Hungary, brother of the murdered Prince, the Queen implored his protection for herself and her unborn child.

The Pope, who had assumed the government of Naples during Joanna's minority, ordered at once Philip de Gabasole, who had been created Cardinal

with the title of St. Mark, to hold an inquiry and to punish the murderers. Should the Queen be found guilty, ran the Papal command, the evidence should be kept secret. But, added the historians favourable to Joanna, the Cardinal was unable to arrive at any definite conclusion. In the meantime, however, the King of Hungary raised a cry for vengeance. He addressed himself to the Court of Avignon, demanding from the Sovereign-Pontiff the punishment of the guilty widow. The Pope at last hurled the thunders of the Church against the murderers of Prince Andrew. Without daring to name them, His Holiness excommunicated the assassins. Louis of Hungary's thirst for revenge, however, and, above all, his ambitions, were not satisfied. He had cast his eyes upon the crown of Naples; he spared no sacrifice and he had bought and acquired many friends. A powerful party was working in his interests at Naples, and from day to day the position of the young Queen became more and more critical. In her despair Joanna felt that she required the protecting arm of a man; she therefore married one of her lovers, her cousin, Louis de Taranto. But in spite of his courage and talent, her new husband was incapable of shielding her from the threatening storm. At the head of an army, Louis of Hungary came from the depths of Germany, unfurling a black flag, upon which was seen the figure of the murdered Prince, and for forty years he never tired of hunting down his sister-in-law. His revenge was satisfied, and his thirst for blood

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## CHAPTER VI

### JOANNA OF NAPLES, THE FAVOURITE OF TWO PONTIFFS

THE Queen was received by the Pontiff in a public consistory. The Pope himself was seated on a throne of crimson and gold, and attired in his white robes of silver tissue, the double crown on his head. Round him, in a semicircle, were seated the Cardinals in their scarlet robes, whilst the magnificent hall was filled with prelates, princes, nobles, and ambassadors from European powers.

Pale and beautiful, the Queen was led into the august assembly by two cardinals, followed by her friends and vassals. Slowly she approached the throne of the Holy Father, kneeling three times before approaching the Pontifical throne and kissing the golden cross embroidered on the Pontiff's linen shoe,\* and then, by a special privilege of her rank, his hand.

Clement VI, it must not be forgotten, was one of the most refined princes of his time. He had certainly more of the chivalrous knight in him than of the austere and morose priest. He was a Don Juan on the Papal throne and always gallant towards

\* The Popes now wear red slippers.

of Naples, whatever his intentions had been, Joanna came, spoke, and conquered ! Once more feminine beauty carried off a victory, prejudicing judge and jury in its favour. One involuntarily wonders what would have been the result of that consistory had Joanna been an ugly woman, even if eloquent ; or how she would have fared if, in her dazzling beauty, she had faced an assembly of judges of her own sex. We wonder ! As it was—more than one of her audience fell in love with the beautiful speaker, and more than one cardinal who sat in judgment was fascinated by her charm. The result of her personal beauty, and of her gift, of eloquence, secured her easy victory and absolute acquittal. "The beauty and eloquence of the Queen of Naples," writes one contemporary author, "would have seduced even the Areopagus." Not only was she declared innocent, but her conduct was said to have been above suspicion. Clement VI publicly absolved her, and she rose from her knees, a sinner no longer. Her heart was full of gratitude for the chivalrous knight who sat on the throne of St. Peter.

And how could she, who, after all, was far from being a model of virtue and a pattern of morals, resist the gallant advances of so amiable a prince as Clement VI ?

The Pope was prevented by etiquette from conducting the fair Queen farther than the distance of two chambers, but he was courtier enough to express by his cordiality of manner and his looks,



ladies Joanna was beautiful, and a queen, and the gallant Pontiff rose to the occasion. He raised the noble lady—kneeling before him, and arraigned as a criminal, accused before the Courts of Europe and the solemn assembly—and kissed her on the lips, and after a few words of paternal protection, placed her on a vacant seat beside him.

She was not an ordinary woman, this Queen—who now stood up before her judges to plead her cause. She spoke in Latin, and her speech is declared by contemporary writers to have been a masterpiece of oratory. She defended her honour and her crown, and did not fail to omit any subtleties of the oratorical art which could move her hearers and dispose her judges in her favour. She was beautiful, young, eloquent—personal magnetism and charm emanated from her and intoxicated the minds and hearts of her audience. If her personality and manner, her grace and charm, had made cardinals and Pope—who allowed themselves to be guided rather by generosity than by justice—forget their rôles as judges, her speech assured her an absolute triumph. She appealed both to the minds and to the feelings of her judges. And soon the suspicions which had been raised against her were silenced. It had been rumoured before that the Pope was prejudiced against her, that he had a personal dislike for the Queen, that he had been shocked when the news of the murder of Andrew had reached him. But whatever Clement VI had believed before he met the Queen

of Naples, whatever his intentions had been, Joanna came, spoke, and conquered ! Once more feminine beauty carried off a victory, prejudicing judge and jury in its favour. One involuntarily wonders what would have been the result of that consistory had Joanna been an ugly woman, even if eloquent ; or how she would have fared if, in her dazzling beauty, she had faced an assembly of judges of her own sex. We wonder ! As it was—more than one of her audience fell in love with the beautiful speaker, and more than one cardinal who sat in judgment was fascinated by her charm. The result of her personal beauty, and of her gift, of eloquence, secured her easy victory and absolute acquittal. "The beauty and eloquence of the Queen of Naples," writes one contemporary author, "would have seduced even the Areopagus." Not only was she declared innocent, but her conduct was said to have been above suspicion. Clement VI publicly absolved her, and she rose from her knees, a sinner no longer. Her heart was full of gratitude for the chivalrous knight who sat on the throne of St. Peter.

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and gestures, his admiration for the fair exile. Joanna had expressed the wish to return to Naples, and to be reinstituted upon the throne of her ancestors, but the Pontiff insisted upon her remaining for some time at the Court of Avignon. A banquet was offered in her honour the very same evening—one of those magnificent receptions which Clement VI was in the habit of giving, and which are known as *the Clementine*. Joanna and her consort, Prince Louis of Taranto, and the noble ladies of the Queen's suite were invited, and the Pope, aided by his favourite, the Comtesse de Turenne, received the guests with his wonted affability. Joanna stayed only a short time at the feast, as feast and song, she said, did not become her state. She was, however, persuaded by the Pontiff to remain a season in Avignon, during which he promised to arrange her affairs and to come to an adjustment with the King of Hungary.

The Queen yielded to the invitation of the gallant Pontiff, thanking him for his protection. She was too clever a woman not to understand what benefit she could derive from her position as favourite of the Pope. She had been declared free of guilt and even above suspicion, but she had not yet been reinstalled upon the throne of Naples, still in the possession of the invaders. And although she knew that both the nobility and the people, treated with insolence and oppressed by the Hungarian invader, were only too anxious to shake off the foreign yoke—imploing her to return—she preferred to avoid

the effusion of blood and to regain her throne by an amicable arrangement. This was not so easy a matter, as Louis of Hungary would not listen to any accommodation, proving unwilling to give up what he held in his possession. To gain the friendship of Clement VI, to make him a willing instrument in her hands, ready to gratify her wishes in every respect, was the aim and goal of the exiled Queen. And to do this she had only to encourage the enamoured Pontiff in his advances. But the Don Juan in Clement did not prevent the politician from keeping an eye upon the advantages accruing to his power. The Pontiff had openly espoused the cause of Joanna ; he had dispatched the Cardinal Guy of Bologna to Naples to treat for peace with Louis of Hungary—but Joanna was not reinstated in her domain until she had offered the city and country of Avignon to the Pope for a stipulated sum of 80,000 florins of gold. Then, and only then, did the Pope reinstate his new favourite upon the throne of Naples and allow her consort, Louis of Taranto, to assume the title of king. Triumphantly the Queen returned to Naples, to the indescribable joy of the inhabitants. Had not her cause been sanctified by the special favour of the Holy See ? Was she not a favourite of the Holy Father ? The superstitious age dared not criticise the actions of the Pope. No matter what mode of life he was leading, people would have thought themselves doomed to eternal perdition if they dared to doubt the infallibility of the Vicar of Christ.

At last Naples was free from the invaders. Louis of Hungary found himself compelled to resign his pretensions to the crown—and he withdrew his troops. A treaty of peace was signed between the two nations, and a day fixed for the coronation of the royal pair. Clement VI dispatched the Bishop of *Bracarenza* to perform the ceremony. Joy reigned supreme in the gay city of Naples, and the King and Queen threw themselves into the whirl of pleasures and dissipation, feasts and prodigalities replaced the days of gloom and anguish, and Joanna's court was only equalled in gay living by that of the Pontiff himself.

A few months after her coronation Joanna's friend and guardian, Clement VI, died. What the fate of the fugitive Queen would have been had an austere monk been seated on the throne of St. Peter instead of that amiable knight and ladies' man one need not speculate upon. The beautiful exile was fortunate in her adversity. She was lucky to have found a powerful protector in the person of the Pontiff, whom she had bewitched by her charms. The sentence of the Pontifical Court had proclaimed her cause to Europe at large—and in an age of chivalry this was sufficient to find many knights ready to follow her banner.

After a pontificate which had lasted eleven years, six months, and sixteen days Clement died at the age of sixty one. Had this Roman Pontiff been a secular sovereign a king of France or of England an emperor of Germany or of Russia the majority

of historians would have declared him a great prince. His pontificate was brilliant, and he had succeeded in many undertakings in which his predecessors had failed. He commanded and was obeyed by the sovereigns of Europe. It is said that his generosity was very great; and in this respect he was a real aristocrat who found pleasure in giving and in bestowing gifts.

Clement VI especially showed his generosity and munificence in those dark days of public calamity, when the Black Death sent terror into the hearts of thousands. Genoese and Catalanian merchants, returning from Syria, had brought the Plague with them in their goods and landed it, when they disembarked, in Sicily. Sure, fatal, irresistible, the scourge marched along—slaying its victims by thousands and tens of thousands. The cholera follows along the banks of rivers—feeling, so to speak, its way, whilst the Plague is blind; it is saying to humanity: "Guide me," and humanity, agitating and agitated, moving about, leads on the terrible scourge—handing it from one to the other. In Avignon the Black Death sent terror into the hearts of the inhabitants. The thronged streets suddenly became empty—the gay crowds disappeared as if by enchantment. Monks and friars were only seen gliding along the deserted city, stealing into gloomy houses where agonising victims awaited death in their beds. Corpses were heaped in the public places, and the gravediggers were too few to bury all the dead. The living barricaded

themselves in their houses to pray and to fast and to shut out the threatening spectre of death—grimly pitilessly claiming new and ever new victims. Prayers and fasting and flagellations were however of no avail. On the contrary they seemed only to increase the number of the victims and frightened Avignon changed therefore its tactics. It threw itself into the whirl of life—nay of dissipation and of gay living and lo! the spectre of death as if frightened by the apparent abundance of life reluctantly retired. Clement VI did his best to help the suffering inhabitants of his city of Avignon. His generosity expressed itself in his munificent gifts. He spent vast sums in paying doctors to attend the poor and to provide a burial ground for them. He bought a vast field outside the city walls known as Champfleury and had the victims of the Plague transferred there. Then he retired into the inner apartments of his palace—where great fires were blazing day and night—allowing no one to penetrate into his presence. *Papa inclusus camerae* writes the ancient chronicler *habenti ignes magnos nulli dabat accessum*.

But people had noticed that the only individuals whose doors the Black Death seemed to avoid were the Jews. The latter were eating clean food and abstaining from drinking the water from the wells and cisterns. Such a natural explanation of cause and effect could scarcely satisfy the ignorant masses of the fourteenth century. The accusation was

therefore raised against the Jews of having poisoned all the wells. In Bâle and Bern, in Strassburg, in Savoy, and in Italy, wherever the Plague had struck down numerous victims, the populace vented its wrath upon the Jews. And when the spectre of destruction stalked through the gates of Avignon, the persecution of the Jews immediately followed in its wake. But Pope Clement VI was too enlightened to allow such an act of injustice. He took the Jews under his protection; and in that century of superstition and mediæval barbarism issued two Bulls in their defence.

When the Plague was over the mendicant friars, who had attended the plague-stricken during the calamity, and to whom many out of gratitude had left their estates, aroused the jealousy of the secular clergy. With hypocritical piety many prelates, cardinals, and bishops asked the Pontiff to suppress the mendicant friars. One saintly prelate accused them in the consistory of having robbed the dying in the days of the Plague, of having entered the houses of the sick in order to pillage, and of having caused a general scandal by their shameful conduct with the prostitutes, when the whole community was plunged into mourning. Clement VI, however, knew that the Cardinal was not stimulated by righteous indignation, but by other less holy motives and as a benevolent prince he was bound to admit that even if the mendicant friars were guilty of little transgressions they had, after all, done good work by attending the dying, by exposing their



lives, and by bringing assistance where others had failed. "No, my brother," said His Holiness, "the mendicant friars are not so contemptible as you pretend. They have received their vocation from God—through the mouth of the Pontiffs—so as to help us in governing the faithful. What would we do, we prelates and princes of the Church, without these poor preaching priests? Could we dare to speak of humility, we who surpass in sumptuousness the Satraps of ancient Persia and the Cæsars of pagan and Imperial Rome? Would we dare to speak of poverty—we who are the possessors of immense wealth and incalculable riches? Would we dare to speak of chastity—we whose excesses only rival those of ancient Sodom and Gomorrha? Would we dare to blame sensuality—we whose banquets are as extravagant as those of Apicius and of Lucullus? Would we condemn frivolity and pleasure—we whose palaces are the very temples of buffoons, histrions, actors, dancers, and singers? No, my brother, let us not judge too severely these friars and monks, who at least preach what they show by their example to be practicable. And if they really have obtained a little money from those whom they have been tending, and to whom they have administered during the Plague—they have deserved it. Let them employ it to recuperate their exhausted strength and regain their health by a little rest and some substantial nourishment, after such a long abstinence."

"I, who am infallible," added Clement, not without a ring of irony in his voice, "I declare them absolved of all the sins which they may have committed. And what is more, I authorise them to retain the nuns in their convents, so that they may increase the population which the terrible scourge has decimated."

If Clement VI lavishly and profusely spent the wealth of the Church in pleasures and festivities he also gave vast sums for noble and charitable purposes. He dissipated the treasures of St. Peter; but he dissipated them very often for good purposes, not forgetting the poor, the widow, and the orphan. His spirit of tolerance was witnessed in many instances in an age of superstition, and his clemency and forgiveness were such that even Petrarch, who was no admirer of the Popes of Avignon, admitted that "none better than he deserved the name of Clement, which was suited to his actions." "*Clemens nomine, Clemens re.*" The Jews, to whom he proved a benevolent protector in those dark days when the Plague ravaged Europe, used to sing his praises in their hymns. Indeed, one can find nothing but praise for Clement the prince, the sovereign. Even his splendid Court, his chivalric style of living, the sumptuousness of his palace, and the pomp and festivities would only make him more interesting and imposing. And even his love affairs would be forgiven—especially if his favourites exercised an influence for good over the Pontiff. The incongruity, however, begins

with the fact that Clement VI was no  
 ment in his right atmosphere. He  
 throne of St. Peter, he was the Vicar  
 was the servant of the servants of  
 priest, a successor of the poor fisher.  
 becomes almost incomprehensible—reviewing the  
 history of Papacy from a distance of six centuries—  
 how mediæval Christendom, aware what a life the  
 Pope was leading, still looked upon him as the Holy  
 Father, holding the keys of Heaven, and in whose  
 hands lay the power to bind and to loosen. It is  
 idle to pretend that his friendship for the Comtesse  
 de Turenne was a purely platonic one. Clement's  
 taste for the society of women has never been  
 disputed. He was no hypocrite in any case, for,  
 according to the testimony of Villani the con-  
 temporary historian, Clement VI did not make a  
 secret of his love affairs. Women of quality had  
 free access to the Pontiff and were as familiar in his  
 private apartments as prelates. They attended  
 him in his illnesses and beguiled his time in his  
 leisure.

When Clement was dead some of the Cardinals  
 who ardently wished for the stability of the Papal  
 power, felt the absolute necessity of a reform in the  
 Church. They resolved to elect a man of severe and  
 austere manners, one who would put a check to the  
 licentiousness of the clergy. Some of them were  
 inclined to raise to the chair of St. Peter a Carthusian  
 monk, reputed for the sanctity of his life and the  
 purity of his morals. Such a device, however,

found opposition among many members of the Sacred College. A monk accustomed to rule over a set of anchorites would not be an accommodating Pontiff, and would compel them, after they had become accustomed to a life of luxury, to lead the simple life of the Apostles and hermits. They finally agreed to elect the Cardinal of Ostia, who took the name of Innocent VI. This Pontiff was succeeded by William de Grimoard, abbot of the Convent of St. Victoire at Marseilles, who took the name of Urban V.

The election of this monk, nurtured in the silence of the cloister, far away from the tumult of the Court and its intrigues, was considered an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Petrarch, in a letter which he addressed to the Pontiff immediately after his election, told him that it was the Holy Spirit who made the Cardinals pronounce his name—for they themselves had never intended to raise the simple abbot to such a high dignity. At the moment of his election the abbot of St. Victoire was at Naples. He had been sent there by Pope Innocent to convey His Holiness's sentiments of condolence to Queen Joanna on the death of her husband, Louis of Taranto. During the time of his residence at the Court of Naples, Urban had become very friendly, and even intimate, with the beautiful Queen, and a close friendship seems to have sprung up between Joanna and the future Pontiff. Urban V became an even greater friend of Joanna than Clement VI had been. Some

whitewashers of Joanna have pointed out that the friendship existing between the Pontiff and the Queen must have been a pure and holy one—considering that Urban had become a canonised saint of the Church. But there are, nevertheless, indications that the favours which Urban V showed to Joanna, and the honours he heaped upon her—honours which had never before or since been lavished upon any other woman—were marks of a more than platonic friendship. Joanna was not a woman to remain a widow for long. She seems to have been quite disposed to console herself for the loss of her husband, in the arms of a successor. And thus immediately after the death of Louis of Taranto the Queen—for political reasons it was said, and in order to be able to keep in check the Neapolitan princes—entered into *pourparlers* for a third marriage. Her ministers advised her to marry as soon as the period of her widowhood had expired, but the Pope was opposed to a third marriage of his friend. Thanks to clever machinations and intrigues, he had succeeded in alienating all the pretenders to the favour of the beautiful Queen. John, King of France, proposed his son Philip, Duke of Tours, as a suitor for the hand of the royal widow. Previous, however, to entering into negotiations with the Court of Naples, the King of France went to Avignon to consult the Holy Father on this important matter. Urban disliked the idea of such a marriage, for it would have placed the Pontiff in a state of dependence

upon the sovereign of France—a prospect which was greatly to the distaste of the former abbot of St. Victoire. In order to dissuade the King of France from the proposed union, His Holiness did not hesitate to represent the bride in an unfavourable light. He described her mode of life, her morals, or rather lack of morals, her excesses, debaucheries, and her many love affairs. He even went so far as to reveal to the King the correspondence which had passed between Clement VI and the Queen of Naples, and in which the causes of the murder of Andrew, her first husband, were explained. In these letters Joanna is supposed to have offered to the Pontiff to pay for her absolution with Neapolitan gold and the love of a beautiful and passionate queen. But Joanna herself did not seem to have been inclined to marry the Duke of Tours; he was a mere boy, ten or twelve years younger than herself. Besides, she, too, was afraid of marrying a prince of so high a lineage supported by the ascendancy of the crown of France. She therefore took for consort, James, King of Majorca. He was one of the handsomest princes of his period, and having lost his kingdom to Pedro of Aragon, he fled to the gay court of Naples, where the hospitable and beautiful Queen received him with open arms—in the broadest sense of the word. James was a king without a kingdom, a poor exiled prince, but he had the good fortune of pleasing the passionate Queen, whose lover he soon became, and who in 1362 asked him to marry her. The Prince accepted

all the conditions imposed upon him—and the marriage was solemnised with great pomp and magnificence

To transfer the Papacy to Rome was the ardent desire of the new Pope. Before his election and when the report of the death of Innocent was beginning to spread he had said publicly in Florence that he would die satisfied if he heard that Innocent's successor would resolve to leave Avignon and sojourn in Rome. Six months after Urban's accession the Romans sent to ask him as they had vainly asked his predecessors to transfer the Holy See to their city and the Pope answered that it was the dearest wish of his heart and God helping him he would accomplish it. Such a resolution required a good deal of courage. Urban knew of the disturbances in Italy. He was not ignorant of the insults to which the ministers of the Church had been exposed and he himself had suffered from the violence of *Bernabo Visconti* to whom he had been sent on a mission by Pope Innocent. He also knew that companies of troops were overrunning Italy in the same manner as they were overrunning France and had reached the very gates of Rome. He knew that Rome where he wished to go although appearing to have accepted authority of the Holy See had recently been the scene of fresh insurrections and as a result of these insurrections the nobles had been driven out and the senatorial power all but abolished. These considerations however did not shake the Pope's resolution. He

judged that the presence of the head of the Church was necessary to strengthen the rebellious people in their duty. But a higher thought also animated his courage. It seemed to him that Papacy had suffered a diminution in its spiritual character in leaving the tombs of the Apostles, and he thought that in returning to Rome it would recover its prestige.

"I shall go to Italy and to Rome—if only to revive the religion of the faithful," he said. Yet the old Pope was mistaken. The Papacy was too dreaded to be restored by the return of the Holy See to Rome.

The Italians eagerly and anxiously desired the change, whilst the French cardinals, composing the majority of the Sacred College, were most unwilling to give up their delightful and princely residences on the banks of the Rhône, their luxurious palaces of Avignon for the melancholy Court of Rome and the palaces on the banks of the Tiber. But not only the Cardinals, the Pope's relations, and his own mother strenuously opposed His Holiness's decision. Urban, however, remained firm, and neither entreaties nor political representations prevailed upon him. No intrigues were spared to make Urban change his mind and abandon his plan. The Cardinals reproached him with the little affection he seemed to have for his native land, pointing out to him how the Saviour had always remained in the land where His cradle had stood.

Charles V, finding it against the Royal interest



that the Pope should leave France, tried to keep him back. He sent ambassadors, one of whom is thought to have been Nicholas Oresme, a learned man enjoying a great reputation for eloquence, who had once been tutor to the King. In a speech in the presence of the Pope and the Cardinals he tried to prove that Urban ought to remain in France. He spoke of the King's piety and showed that France had always been helpful to the Holy See in hours of trial, that France had greater devotion to the Church than Italy had, that France offered a surer refuge, and that in going to Rome the Pontiff was exposing himself to cruel tribulation. Petrarch wrote for his part strengthening Urban in his resolve. Quite recognising that the Pope, no matter where his residence was the head of the Universal Church, he showed that sacred ties bound him to Rome that in breaking these ties he betrayed his mission, and he finished by imploring Urban to listen to the voice of his conscience and to fear the judgment of God. More serious was the opposition of the Sacred College.

For the most part, foreigners to Italy, and much attached to the rich dwellings that they had built for themselves either at Avignon or at Villeneuve the Cardinals could not make up their minds to go to live with people unknown to them to turbulent republics in a country raved by civil war, and they beset the Pope with their complaints and their reproaches. Urban was unshaken threatening to deprive the refractory Cardinals and to nominate

Italians in their places. Only by these threats he obtained their obedience, if not their approval.

Urban's mother threw herself on the ground before him in the moment when he was leaving the Papal palace, declaring that he would have to tread over her body before leaving Avignon. But the Pontiff appropriately quoted a scriptural passage, "And he shall tread on the asp and the basilisk," and passed on—without even attempting, in filial duty, to raise his mother from her kneeling posture. Petrarch, delighted at the prospect of seeing the Pontiff returning to Rome, bitterly satirised those Cardinals who opposed His Holiness's return. "They were being taken away," he wrote, "from their delightful life of *far niente* and led to a land they abhorred. They were crying like prisoners led to Memphis by their Saracen captors and not to Rome, the holy city, the apostolic seat, where they ought to be the kings and the princes."

When everybody was praising the Holy Father for his firmness, his austere character, his holy zeal and his endeavours to reform the licentiousness of the Papal court, Petrarch had remained silent. He was well acquainted with the secret plans of the Pontiff, for did not his friend, Francis Bruni, exercise the functions of apostolic secretary? Yet the lover of Laura de Noves hesitated to accord his goodwill and praise to a man who remained a stranger to Italy, who still continued to reside in the Papal palace at Avignon.

Urban left Avignon for Marseilles on April 30,

1367, in spite of so much that might have made him hesitate. Three Cardinals remained in Avignon, fifteen followed the Pope, some were to set sail with him and some to go by land and rejoin him in Italy. The Pontiff stopped a certain time at Marseilles, and here he had either to overcome the resistance or to suffer the recriminations of those who accompanied him. He touched at Corneto, June 7. A Roman deputation came to offer him the lordship of Rome, with the keys of St Angelo. On the 9th he reached Viterbo and found the ambassadors whom the Emperor, the Queen of Naples, and the King of Hungary had sent to meet him. The Patriarch of Constantinople sent by John Paleologus also came to swell the numbers.

"Now," wrote Petrarch, "now you appear the Sovereign-Pontiff, successor of St Peter and Vicar of Christ. Without doubt you were all this before, by your dignity and your office, but you are doubly so now by piety and sentiments. You have repaired the faults of five of your predecessors. Thanks to God and to you, I see the Church once more established on her throne. You have brought her back to her ancient dwelling, restored to her also her virtues, that she may become again worthy of the veneration of the world."

The Pontiff was received with joy by the population. No Pope had visited Rome for sixty-three years; and Urban could see the evil caused by the civil wars. The basilicas of St Paul were half-ruined, and St John of the Lateran had been

partly consumed by fire. Convents and churches were deserted—everywhere one could see signs of ruin. And with all that no real authority in the city but the authority of the people, always on the verge of revolution and only constant in its hatred of the nobles. Urban did his best to remedy these disorders. He ordered the restoration of the most threatened buildings and tried to reconstruct the government of the city.

Among the Princes of Italy who had come to greet the returning Pope and receive his benediction was also Joanna, his friend of former days. We have seen that at the moment when the Cardinals decided to place Urban on the throne of St. Peter he was at Naples, where he had been sent to convey the condolences of his predecessor, but in reality to watch over the conduct of the Queen, to whom austere and simple-minded Innocent was not favourably inclined. But if she had failed to gain the friendship of Innocent VI. Joanna had succeeded in absolutely bewitching his successor. So great was Urban's infatuation with this striking woman—some historians say the esteem he bore her—that he little cared for public opinion and publicly demonstrated his regard for her. The Queen of Naples arrived in Rome in 1368, at the beginning of Lent. She was met by Pierre de Lusignan, King of Cyprus, who conducted her to the gate of the city, where she was received by cardinals, clergy, and nobility. On the steps of St. Peter's Church the former abbot of St. Victoire

—whom the Queen had honoured with her friendship in the days when the dream of Pontifical dignity had scarcely appeared possible of realisation to him—awaited the arrival of Joanna. The head of Christendom, in honour of the majestic woman, descended a few steps to meet her. He then led her to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, there to pray at the holy shrine. These marks of honour were witnessed by numerous crowds who had come to watch the procession. Joanna was admitted into the intimacy of the Holy Father, who—to the annoyance and surprise of Lusignan, King of Cyprus—passed his days closeted with her in his apartments. Soon Rome had another proof of the Pope's unbounded admiration for this beautiful woman.

In accordance with an ancient custom, the Pontiff used to receive a golden rose from the people of Rome on the fourth Sunday in Lent called Lætare. This rose—which the Pontiff wore in his breast whilst celebrating Holy Mass—he offered to some distinguished person as a mark of honour. It was a mark of distinction greatly coveted, and all present were almost sure that the rose would be offered to the King of Cyprus. But to the surprise of the Cardinals and the disgust of the King, Urban, at the conclusion of the service, placed the blessed rose on the head of the Queen. No doubt, from an æsthetic point of view the ornament was well placed on that beautiful head, but the Cardinals nevertheless remonstrated with His Holiness for

such a lack of tact. "Never," they said, "had a woman—even a queen—been deemed worthy of such an honour, especially when a king was present." To this the Pope haughtily replied: "Have you ever seen a simple abbot on the throne of St. Peter?"

The city of Rome witnessed the triumphs of Joanna. The crowned courtesan who, *à la Cleopatra*, had charmed two Sovereign-Pontiffs, traversed the Eternal City surrounded by a cortège of nobles and prelates. To silence his critics, Urban decided to bestow an even greater honour upon his favourite, and on Easter Sunday he publicly, in the presence of the Court and the foreign ambassadors, praised the Queen of Naples for her charitable disposition, her gentle nature and her courage, and presented her with the consecrated sword and hat. The Queen, however, is supposed to have offered the sword to the King of Cyprus, whose mortification had touched her heart, and to have kept the blessed pearl-embroidered hat. At the beginning of May, 1368, the Pope left Rome and retired to his delightful villa of Montefiascole, there to inhale the pure country air. He was accompanied by the Queen of Naples, who shared the Pontifical *villégiature*. Did she compensate in those rural and pastoral surroundings the friendship of the pastor of the Catholic Church, as she had compensated Clement VI for the interest he had shown her?

"If one considers," says an impartial historian, "the character of Joanna, and the general morality

prevalent at the Roman Court in those days, one can scarcely doubt these assertions.\* If Petrarch has nothing but praise for Pope Urban V, not accusing him of an irregularity of conduct as he did his predecessors who resided at Avignon, it must be borne in mind that the poet of Vaucluse loved Italy above all and his admiration for the Pontiff knew no bounds as soon as Urban had transferred the Holy See from the banks of the Rhône to those of the Tiber. Rome could cover many sins! And whilst Urban was enjoying the delights of country air and the agreeable company of the fascinating Queen, James, her husband, who had returned to Naples, had been informed of what was happening at the Court of Rome. He immediately wrote to his wife, ordering her at once to return to Naples, threatening—in case of disobedience—to inform the sovereigns of Europe of her infamy. But Urban V was not a man to be thwarted in anything upon which he had set his mind. We have seen how neither the supplications of his mother nor the remonstrances of the Cardinals could deter him from his purpose to leave Avignon for Rome. Thus, when the Pontiff saw that he was to be deprived of his favourite, he annulled, under the pretext of relationship, the marriage of Joanna and James †

\* Joudon J. B. *Histoire des Souverains Pontifes* etc. (Avignon 1855) vol. I p. 107

† Three months after his marriage James had left Naples to avenge the death of his father who had been murdered by Peter the Cruel of Aragon. He was made a prisoner by Henry of Transjume. He managed however to send intelligence of his plight to his wife who procured his liberty by paying a very heavy ransom (cf. Froissart *Chronicles*). He returned to Naples but here he found that his wife was at the Court of the Pope.

The Holy Father published a Bull, by which he declared the Queen of Naples perfectly free to take another husband. Such Bulls were quite frequent in those days of mediævalism. It is worthy of note that the laws of the Catholic Church, during the period of mediæval darkness and errors, formed an inextricable chaos. Whilst on the one hand the Roman Pontiffs, in the name of the Gospel, were recommending the Christians to have only one wife—and even none at all—they often advised the princes and sovereigns of Europe, whenever it served their political purposes, to divorce their legitimate spouses and marry others. The Popes granted dissolution of marriages in many cases at the request of the sovereigns, or annulled them, whenever they pleased. Had they not the power to bind and to loosen?

Urban V did not lack in precedents, and among his successors Alexander VI annulled the marriages of the Kings of Hungary and of Portugal, and Pope Clement VII that of Henri de Navarre, authorising him to marry Marie de Medicis. Clement IX was prevailed upon by the Cardinal de Vendôme to annul the marriage of the King of Portugal, Alphonso, and allow his wife to marry Don Pedro, her brother-in-law and lover. Whilst forbidding divorce, the Pope had also the power to annul any marriage which he disapproved of. Thus Urban availed himself of his prerogative of infallibility and annulled the marriage of Joanna and James of Majorca. But as the Italian princes had revolted against the Pope, and



Bernabo Visconti again began to cover the towns and villages of unhappy Italy with blood and ruin. Joanna did not care to share the peril of her lover and returned to Naples. In vain had the Pontiff made use of his ecclesiastical arms such as excommunication against the rebels and he invoked the help of the Emperor Charles. The latter came at the head of an army of 20 000 men but the Pope had at last begun to realise that his safety was in jeopardy. The lovely seclusion of Montefiascone had lost its charm his sojourn in Italy had proved fraught with anxiety, and the turbulence of the inhabitants the democracy of the towns ever ready to revolt against authority and power had destroyed his peace and ruined his health. Urban regretted his peaceful city of Avignon to which his imagination now constantly reverted. He regretted the charming banks of the Rhone where the river winds its course between meadows covered with olive trees and hills crowned with vines, where an atmosphere of peace seemed to hover above the fairy scene upon which nature had lavished her luxury and her beauty. The homesick Cardinals—Frenchmen who can never grow accustomed to a foreign land however beautiful it is—did their best to induce His Holiness to return to Avignon. Urban required a pretext to leave Italy and he found it in the threatened renewal of a disastrous war between France and England. To prevent the hostilities to mediate between the Kings of England and France, the Pope decided to return at once to

Provence and establish his Court at Avignon. Whilst, however, the French Cardinals were happy at the prospects of a speedy return, the consternation of the Italian party was great. And as everything had been set on foot sometime before to prevent the Pontiff leaving Avignon, nothing was now left undone by the Italian party to keep him still in Rome.

Thus, in the month of May, 1370, Urban announced his intention of returning to Avignon. The motive he gave was that he wished to work from near by at the reconciliation of the Kings of France and England, between whom war had again been declared. Astonished at this unexpected news; the Romans sent to implore the Pontiff to renounce his determination. Urban answered that although his person would not be with them, his heart would always be. A friar, belonging to the royal family of Aragon, fearing also the effects of the emotion which the announcement of the Pope's departure had caused in Rome, tried to turn away his resolution, telling him that his departure might cause a schism; a foresight of which later events proved the justice.

Petrarch addressed a letter to the Pope, in which he exclaimed "Forgive him, O Lord, for he has been seduced by evil-minded advisers, so that he is not afraid of offending Jesus Christ and St. Peter; forgive him for his weakness and his fragility, forget the faults of his youth and the errors of his old age, for in his heart he is an honest man." Again a

woman came forward to prevent the Pope from leaving the Vatican as one had endeavoured to prevent his departure from Avignon. Once it had been his mother now it was a saint who had come from Sweden to Rome a prophetess who knew the decrees of Providence. It was the holy St Bridget a descendant of one of the most noble families of Sweden. At the age of thirteen she had been married to a young noble and after having given birth to eight children she and her husband undertook a pilgrimage to the shrine of St James of Compostella. On their return the pious travellers decided to embrace a religious life. The husband died before having fulfilled his vow, but the wife founded a double monastery for sixty nuns and twenty five friars of the Order of St Augustine. She gave them rules which she maintained had been revealed unto her by Providence. And now when she heard of the decision of Urban V to leave Rome and return to Avignon she became a very valuable instrument in the hands of the Italian party. St Bridget obtained an audience of the Pontiff and informed His Holiness that it had been revealed unto her by the Holy Virgin that if he dared to return to Avignon he would shortly die. The Pope was astute enough to see through the manoeuvre and to understand that the Italian clergy were thus endeavouring to intimidate and force him to remain in Rome. His mind was made up and neither the poetic exhortations of Petrarch nor the menaces of St Bridget could prevail upon him. Again Urban

asked his friend Joanna to furnish him with galleys which would carry him back to Provence. The Queen readily complied, and once more the Papacy was on the banks of the Rhône, and Urban held his entry into Avignon amid the joyous acclamations of the inhabitants.

The Pope's health, however, had been undermined. The sojourn in Italy had worn him out, his life was hastening to a close; and after a few months' residence in Avignon he died on December 19, 1370. Thus again Queen Joanna had lost a powerful friend and protector. She had been the friend of two Popes—of the elegant and gentle Clement VI and of the severe and austere Urban V: a modern Cleopatra, who knew how to bewitch those who had the power to control her destinies. But henceforth the power of the Church was no longer to be exercised in her defence and no Bulls of excommunication were to be hurled against her enemies—the enemies of a Papal favourite.

It does not come within the province of this book to relate the life of Queen Joanna, but suffice it to say that her husband, James of Majorca, having died in Spain in 1375, she contracted a fourth marriage with Otho of Brunswick. She was then forty-six years of age, but still very beautiful, and many were the suitors to her hand, heart, and crown. Alas! trouble soon befell this remarkable Queen, who has often been compared to Mary Queen of Scots. Pope Urban VI proved an inveterate enemy of the favourite of two of his

predecessors Joanna had rejoiced at the election of Nicholas Prignano Archbishop of Bari a Neapolitan who took the name of Urban VI But alas! she had made a great mistake in the character of this Pontiff No sooner was he seated on the throne of St Peter than he forgot all the favours he had received from the Queen and plotted her downfall with the Duke of Andria What had caused Urban's hatred of Joanna it is difficult to say Was it his nepotism his desire to aggrandise his nephew Francisco Prignano for whom he desired a greater part of the Kingdom of Naples? And when Nicholas Spinelli reminded the Pontiff of Joanna's former favours pointing out that she had advanced him to high honours from his obscure station the vulgar and violent Pontiff exclaimed I tell you I shall soon send the Queen to spin in the monastery of St Clare He manifested his hostility against Joanna on more than one occasion and his conduct towards her ambassadors was very insulting The Queen had endeavoured to make peace between the Pope and the Cardinals whom he had been treating as some angry schoolmaster might have treated unruly boys Tired and disgusted with his tyranny, the Cardinals had retired to Anagni where they issued an encyclical declaring Urban's election null and void In his fury the Pope wrote a most insulting letter to the Queen of Naples reminding her of her crimes of the murder of her first husband Andrew of her debaucheries with his two predecessors Clement VI and Urban V and threatened

to divulge her crimes and excommunicate her. An open breach between the Courts of Naples and Rome was the result. Joanna now joined the discontented Cardinals and offered them her protection and the town of Fondi, in the kingdom of Naples, where they held a conclave. Robert, Cardinal of Geneva, was elected Pope, under the name of Clement VII.

Two Popes were now occupying the throne of St. Peter, excommunicating and hurling anathemas against each other. Thus the great Western schism was inaugurated, and European Christendom was divided into Urbanists and Clementists.

As for Joanna, she became a staunch friend and partisan of Clement VII, and, when his safety at Fondi was being threatened, installed him at Castel del Ovo until he went to Avignon, which became the seat of the Antipopes! Urban VI denounced Joanna as a conspirator and an heretic, a modern Messalina, and hurled the thunderbolt of excommunication against her. Other forces were also at work to compass her ruin. Louis, the brother of her first husband, was still thirsty for revenge: and as indications of adversity are always signals for the gathering of enemies, through the union of hostile influences she eventually lost her kingdom, and on being taken prisoner was strangled or smothered with pillows in the year 1382. Thus ends the story of a queen whom many have endeavoured to exonerate, but who, according to trustworthy authorities, was the favourite of two successive Pontiffs.

## CHAPTER VII

### ALEXANDER VI AND HIS FAVOURITES VÁNOZZA AND JULIA LARNESE

POPE INNOCENT VIII succeeded to Pope Sixtus. He had several illegitimate children and in order to provide one of them with land and people Girolamo Riario, nephew of the late Pope who possessed Forlì and Imola had to leave this earthly state quite suddenly, April 14, 1488.

As for his daughter Theodorica the Pontiff did not rest until he had provided her with a large dowry and married her to a Genoese noble. He showed himself just as generous to his other sons and daughters. Of his sons one became Archbishop of Benevento another was created Cardinal and a third was made Governor of the Castle Sant Angelo. Of his daughters the least fortunate married a Roman baron. In short the Holy Father showed that he was a true father and if one blames him for the innumerable scandals and crimes he committed it must also be acknowledged that he committed all for the sake of his children!

But I must now speak about a Pope who exceeded all his predecessors in infamy—one who will always

go down to posterity as a Pontiff who, in spite of being a man of great mental attainments, was a monster of vice, unequalled in the history of the world. This was Rodrigo, or Alexander VI, who succeeded Innocent in 1492. He belonged to an old noble family from Valencia in Spain, and known there by the name of Langolo. His father went to Venice, settled there, and changed, why it is not known, his surname Langolo to that of Borgia, a name afterwards made notorious by Alexander VI. Rodrigo had studied law, then entered the military profession, and lived the usual life of young officers of that time. He soon became known in Venice on account of his wild adventures and amours; he left the Army for the Church, because his uncle, the Bishop of Valencia, had promised him particular protection. The future Pontiff further saw that promotion came quicker in the Church than in the Army. It must also be understood that his manner of life was not changed. Only what he had done openly now he did in secret.

When Rodrigo Borgia was elected Pope he was already father of five children. Their mother was Vanozza Catanei; and although historians seem somewhat uncertain about her origin she evidently came of a noble family.

Vanozza was a rich widow when she enjoyed Rodrigo's intimate acquaintance, and he evidently knew how to win her through flattery, for she gave herself to him body, soul, honour, and fortune. She is represented as being very beautiful, but



does not seem to have been very young as she had two daughters nearly grown up when Rodrigo made her acquaintance. The charm of these girls even then made a deep impression on Rodrigo at that time nineteen years of age. He did not let the mother perceive his passion but knew how to misrepresent himself so that when Vanozza died she left him in the position of guardian to her daughters. Vanozza dead he was able to declare himself. The elder girl hid her shame in a convent but the younger became the mistress of her late mother's lover although the fact was concealed from general knowledge.

While the young Borgia was leading this life in Venice Alphonso Borgia already mentioned as the Bishop of Valencia was elected Pope on April 8 1455 and took the name of Calixtus III. Rodrigo hurried to Rome to congratulate his uncle and to remind him of his promise of protection. The Pope received his nephew affectionately handed over to him a benefice bringing in 12 000 florins annually named him Bishop of Valencia and soon raised him to the cardinalate giving him a yearly income of 28 000 florins. All this happened in three years for Calixtus III died in 1458.

Now that Rodrigo was Cardinal he strove his utmost to reach the Papal chair and in order to attain his ambition he hid his real nature succeeding in it so well that the world believed in his virtue. For a time his mistress remained behind in Venice but soon she followed him to Rome. He did not

receive her in his palace, but employed a necessitous Spanish grandee to play the part of sham husband to the young Vanozza, and to take the false title of Count of Castile. All the real expenses of this household were defrayed by Cardinal Rodrigo. The Cardinal excused his visits by spreading the report that the Count of Castile was a near relation of the Borgia family. By these means the real relations of the pious prince of the Church and Vanozza were hidden from the gaze of the world, and only a few people knew that the five children which Vanozza had borne were the children of his Eminence the Cardinal Rodrigo. These five children received in baptism the names of Francis, Caesar, Geoffrey, Louis, and Lucretia. One is forced to acknowledge that the Cardinal refused them nothing, and they were brought up in accordance with the position they were supposed to occupy. Rome has always proved a favourable soil upon which irregular *ménages* seem to flourish. The house of Vanozza stood in the most fashionable quarter of the city, in the del Ponte, hard by the palace of Rodrigo Borgia in the piazza Pizzo di Merle. And here, surrounded by wealth in salons resplendent with the rich furniture of the period, in the midst of a luxurious installation of the first Renaissance, grew up those children of a Cardinal who were soon to become the children of a Pontiff. They grew up in the immorality and promiscuity of nymphs and sylvan gods, in the silence of some forest. They knew that that splendid woman

Vinozza was their mother but that her reputed husband was nothing to them. Their real father was that illustrious personage who dwelling in a palace was clad in purple and fine linen and whose portrait occupied the place of honour in their mother's house. From time to time this illustrious personage came to visit them and sat down at table in company of their mother and the most handsome cultured but also debauched gentlemen of Rome—Orsini Barberini and others. They did honour to the fiery wines of Spain and Sicily and their conversation had little of the sanctity and the unctuousness of the Church. The illustrious personage also used to take them on his knees and dandle them those children of love. For this Don Juan on the Pontifical throne was if not a Holy Father of the Church and Christendom a good and indulgent father to his children. One must do him thus much justice. With rare solicitude in the midst of his orgies and selfish pleasures Rodrigo Borghese watched the growth and upbringing of his sons and daughters.

He was not only a man of pleasure and sensuality an ardent voluptuary eager for wealth and power but also a clever adroit roué a kind of Louis XV on the Papal throne fashioned after the manners of the fifteenth century. For him the Church absolutely disappeared in the State which he had founded. His sovereignty was not hereditary and therefore he was anxious to assure the future of his children during his lifetime. And for these children

his Cæsar and Lucretia, nothing appeared too difficult—he stopped at no crime when it was a question of their advantage or happiness. The Pontiff was an excellent paterfamilias.

From a tender age, Borgia's three sons had stood high in the favour of Pope Innocent VIII. Cæsar was made Archbishop of Pampluna, whilst Geoffrey, a boy of nine, was appointed Canon Archdeacon of Valencia. For his daughter, Lucretia, the Cardinal father was dreaming of a Spanish marriage ; but ere the marriage had been celebrated, the Papal dignity had shed its lustre upon the family, and what had seemed good enough for the daughter of a Cardinal could no longer satisfy the ambition of a daughter of the Sovereign-Pontiff. For Rodrigo Borgia, the lover of Vanozza, had been placed upon the throne of St. Peter. With tremulous impatience Rome was waiting to hear the result of the Conclave ; but what was it as compared to the fever of expectation that possessed the inmates of the house of Vanozza ? Was not the lover—the father—going to become the first sovereign of Christendom ? What a change in their fortunes, in their expectations, in their future ! The election took place, and Rodrigo Borgia became Pope Alexander VI.

Vanozza Catanei, too, was anxious to hear the result of the election. But it was not the mistress in her who ardently desired the supreme honour for her lover, it was the mother wishing to see the father of her children ascend the Papal throne. Vanozza was fifty then—and she knew well the

sickleness of her lover. She could not claim his love for ever. The Papal Don Juan had found new and fresh loves to satisfy his ardour. Henceforth she was content with a friendship, with the memories of the past, and the satisfaction of seeing her children rise to undreamt-of honours. She was not an intrusive mistress, was this Vanozza. She had loved the handsome Cardinal in an unselfish manner—had loved him for himself, as many women had loved him before her, for, indeed, this Pontiff, who has been surnamed a monster of iniquity, was the darling of the ladies of Rome. They loved him, not as the widows of Corinth and Syracuse had loved the Apostles—a love purely platonic and abstract, a love which filled the head and the heart, but with a love more concrete, and with a passion which stimulated the senses and quickened the pulsation of the southern blood in their veins.

And indeed Alexander VI was a very handsome man. For a long time Rome had not admired the spectacle of such a Pontiff as Alexander Borgia. Majesty and grace, charm, seduction, and authority were coupled in him. His noble stature, his imposing gestures, his aristocratic, shapely hands, and his magnetic voice all contributed to make him the idol of all the ladies of the Eternal City. People said that God had evidently created him for the purpose of ascending the throne, saying "*Ecce sacerdos magnus*."

Gaspard of Verona, a contemporary, writes of

him: "He is handsome, seductive, of joyous aspect, and gentle in speech and manner. When he sees a beautiful woman his whole being begins to vibrate, and as quickly as the magnet draws the iron he is drawing her to him." "*Statura procerus colore medio, nigris oculis, ore paululum pleno*" writes another contemporary. Of high stature, his countenance slightly coloured, his eye dark and flashing, his lips full and red, robust, able to withstand the fatigues of his office and of pleasure, eloquent, a man of the world, courteous and affable: such was the new Pontiff! What wonder that women loved him? Vanozza had been one of his first loves; and when her charms had begun to fade she modestly withdrew, leaving the Sovereign-Pontiff to seek other—fresher and newer loves. But her attachment to the father of her children was great, and she fervently prayed—whilst the Conclave was sitting—to a benevolent Providence to raise the handsome sinner upon the throne of St. Peter!

At the dawn messengers arrived from the Vatican to announce the glad tidings. And when on that happy morning Alexander was carried from the Conclave to the metropolis of St. Peter, there to receive the first homage of the Roman people, he looked round for his family, and in the midst of the vast crowd perceived his children and their mother—happy in his and their good fortune!

And thus Rodrigo Borgia became Pope Alexander VI. He had succeeded in spreading such a halo of piety around himself that public opinion pointed to

him as the worthiest candidate for the Papal chair at the death of Innocent VIII. Rodrigo Borgia spared neither gold nor promise to bring the majority of the Cardinals to his side giving out that his health was really undermined and that he had not long to live. The result of all this was that in 1492 on August 11 with twenty two votes against five he was elected Pope and the Roman populace displayed the wildest joy. Truly the five Cardinals against him knew him very well indeed and whispered that now without doubt a reign of vice had begun such as had never been seen in Rome before. The King of Naples was also gifted with prophecy when he wrote to his wife. A man has been placed on the chair of St. Peter who will deliver Christendom to the devil. But Vanozza was not his only mistress rejoicing in Borgia's elevation. Sometime before Julia Farnese young of dazzling beauty and charm had captivated his aged heart. They called her *la bella Giulia* the beautiful Julia or the beautiful Farnese and the sexagenarian fell violently in love with the sweet child—for she was only a child barely fifteen well developed and matured by a southern climate. He saw her one day in the house of Adrienne Orsini Julia being engaged to marry young Orsini the son of Adrienne. The prelate's instincts were roused and the fall of an angel was decided upon. The future mother-in-law shut her eyes and even facilitated the fall of her prospective daughter-in-law.

A few days later the marriage of Ursinus Orsini and Giulia Farnese was celebrated in the palace of the Borgias, Alexander himself officiating and giving his benediction to the young couple.

A great house issued from this sacrilegious adultery of the priest and the beautiful child. Hitherto the house of Farnese had remained almost unknown. It had been vegetating in obscurity. But it owed its future, its glory, and its rapid rise to the idolatrous love of the Papal lover for the beautiful Giulia. The brother of Giulia was made Cardinal; and his way was prepared to the throne of St. Peter, which he was afterwards to ascend under the name of Paul III.

This brother of the mistress of a Pope was far from being a model of purity and morals—he was a debauchee and a roué. Rome knew him by the name of “His Eminency Cotillon”, but what did the Pontiff care? And even if the Sacred College had expressed its indignation, the amorous Pope could refuse nothing to the caresses of his mistresses. And “bella Giulia” had strong family affections. Unlike many other courtesans and favourites of sovereigns and princes, she did not forget her relations. She was an instrument in the hands of her family for their aggrandisement; and her relations did not hesitate to exploit her shame, which they considered as a source of revenue to them. Vanozza seems to have loved Alexander for himself, but it is scarcely likely that the brilliant young child should have felt any affection for her



little did she care to hide her intimacy that she went to live in the palace of *Santa Maria in Portica*, together with Lucretia, the famous daughter of Pope Alexander. Lorenzo Pucci, the envoy of the Florentine Republic, describes the interior of this palace where the mistress and the daughter of the Pope lived in happy harmony. Stepdaughter and stepmother *de la main gauche* had much in common and seemed to have been greatly attached to one another.

"Last night I accompanied Monsignor Farnese to the vespers of the Pope," writes Lorenzo Pucci. "Waiting for the presence of His Holiness in the chapel, I entered for a moment or so the palace of Santa Maria, to pay my respects to Madonna Julia. She had just washed her hair and was sitting by the fire with Madonna Lucretia, the daughter of our master, and Madonna Adrienne. They received me with the utmost grace and affability, and Madonna Julia made me sit down by her side. After a while she went to fetch her child, which is already quite big ; it is the very image of the Pope. And the mother herself—how beautiful she looks ! She has put on flesh—has grown a little stouter ; but I consider her a splendid creature ! She took her hair down in my presence, and it reached her ankles. I wish you had been present here, to contemplate with your own eyes her radiant beauty. Madonna Lucretia left us for a while to change her dress, and soon reappeared in a costume of violet velvet. The vespers were now finished,

the Cardinals had retired, and I left the ladies "

To say, however, that Alexander VI remained faithful to his youthful favourite would be representing this routé on the Papal throne. It were the beauties who had captivated the heart of the aged Pontiff. They were passing caprices, however, caprices of an hour, exercising no lasting influence upon the lover. A Venetian ambassador relates the story of a Roman father who had sold his married daughter to the Pontiff. One day his husband cut off the head of the obliging father-in-law, and sticking it on a spear wrote underneath "This is the head of my father-in-law. He has procured his daughter to the Pope." The same envoy also speaks of a beautiful Spanish girl, mistress of the Duke of Gandia, whom the dutiful son disinterestedly sent as a present to the Holy Father—like some officious Turkish *valide* offering a Circassian slave to the Sultan of the Faithful. To do the Borgias justice, one must admit that the morality—or rather immorality—was not different from that of the Courts of Louis XIV and Louis XV, but then Louis XIV and Louis XV had not the power to bind and to loosen in the name of Christ. They did not wear purple and tiara and did not touch divine things with their soiled hands. At the Court of Alexander Borgia vice paraded impudently clad in sacerdotal garments and the double-faced Moloch celebrated Holy Mass and officiated at the sacred mysteries of religion—after having

participated in pagan orgies *derrière les coulisses*. In the midst of these orgies the Pontiff's life came to a sudden close.

Alexander VI died ; succumbing to the poison of which he had so often availed himself in perpetrating his numerous crimes. The poison he had so often mixed for others, he drank himself. They say that his son Cæsar, desirous of possessing himself of the estates of several rich Cardinals, had invited them to one of his dainty suppers *à la Borgia* in the gardens of the Pope. The wines destined for the guests had been scrupulously prepared according to the formula. But the butler made a fatal mistake ; and instead of the guests, the Holy Father and his son quaffed the cups of Spanish and Sicilian wines into which the poison had been mixed.

[The necessary invitations had been sent out , it was summer time, and the Pope was to meet his friends in a vineyard not far from the Vatican. All the arrangements for the little feast were entrusted to Cæsar, who also had to prepare the poisoned cups. In order that the poisoned wine should not be mistaken for the other wine, Cæsar sent a faithful servant of his to the vineyard with an order to place the poisoned wine in a particular place and to watch over it, that none should drink it except those whom he himself should point out. The servant did as he was ordered, but when the Papal cellarer asked why that particular wine was placed apart, he replied laughing that it was a wine of extra-

ordinary strength, and therefore *must only* be handed to the most highly honoured guest. This answer the cellarer naturally found quite plausible. The Pope arrived rather earlier than the other guests, for he had to talk things over with Cæsar. It was the Pope's misfortune to have left a small amulet (a consecrated Host in a little gold case, which he always carried with him, because it had been foretold that he should not die as long as he was not parted from it) behind in his apartment in the Vatican, and he sent his son's faithful servant, the same who was watching the poisoned wine, to fetch it. Scarcely was the servant gone when the Pope, calling to his cellarer, asked if everything was in order. As the weather was so oppressively hot and he felt very thirsty, he wished to drink a goblet of wine immediately. The cellarer, not daring to give the Pontiff inferior wine, and really believing what the servant had told him, that this wine was the best, filled a decanter and placed it on the bench on which Alexander was seated. Without suspicion, the Pontiff filled a goblet with the wine and drank it quickly. In the moment Cæsar arrived, and as he was thirsty, he, too, filled the goblet and emptied it as his father had done. A quarter of an hour later supper was served, but before he had taken a mouthful the Pope fell to the ground, writhing like a worm, suffering great bodily pains. Cæsar Borgia almost immediately showed the same symptoms, and the two noble sufferers were hastily carried to the palace. The

his corpse been carried out of the Vatican when Julia Farnese entered it on the arm of Pope Julius II. What a priestess of vice and of corruption this woman was! Had she lived in the days of pagan Hellas she would have been deified—for Greece, worshipping beauty of form, rused altars to the priestesses of love to Venus and her disciples. And this Phryne Farnese of the Renaissance, was she not a worthy disciple of those *grandes amoureuses* of antiquity, who had become the friends and equals of philosophers and politicians?

Julia Farnese may well be placed by the side of all those favourites of sovereigns who, from the days of Augustus to those of Louis XVIII, have been the ruling cause and fatal origin of events in the government of peoples. The fames of Madame de Maintenon the widow Scarron, and of Diane de Poitiers fade before that of Julia Farnese. Diane de Poitiers had for lovers two kings, but was not Julia Farnese the favourite of two Popes? Diane ruled at Fontainebleau, whilst Julia reigned supreme at the Vatican. Jean Goujon was at the service of the mistress of the King of France, but the favourite of the Popes could boast of that of Michael Angelo! The proud Borgias and the Roveres were under her slipper! She trod on the tiara of two Popes, and the triumph of her immodesty governing the Church, Christendom and the world eclipses the influence of Madame de Maintenon, which has been greatly exaggerated. Julia's daughter, the child of Alexander VI, married

the nephew of Pope Julius II—a worthy Papal alliance!

## CHAPTER VIII

### IONNA OLIMPIA THE FAVOURITE OF POPE INNOCENT X

IN one of the rooms of the Papal Palace sat the aged Pontiff Innocent X. It was one of the most modest chambers in the Quirinal and its contents showed none of the sumptuousness of the other apartments. Flanders tapestries covered the walls and a long table a few chairs two fauteuils and a *prie Dieu* surmounted by a crucifix completed the furniture. It was in the month of December the clocks of Rome had just struck ten when the silence was suddenly broken by the wheels of a carriage swiftly driving through the deserted streets. Silently the gates of the Quirinal opened and but as soon as the carriage had passed. The door of the carriage was quickly opened by one of the valets, and a woman slipped out. Although past middle age her movements were graceful and agile. In her hand she was carrying a packet of papers which she handed over to one of the Pope's faithful private attendants who had been in the service of His Holiness since the days when Innocent was Papal Nuncio in Spain.

The Spaniard approached the door of the private apartment of the Pontiff, knocked softly, and then opened the door, announcing the visitor: Her Excellency Donna Olimpia. The lady entered quickly, and the door was shut, leaving Donna Olimpia alone in the presence of the Vicar of Christ. Innocent had made a movement as if to rise; but his great age—he was then seventy-five years—and the promptitude with which the lady put her hand on his, kept him in his seat.

"I know that you have been unwell these days, but I have heard this morning that you were better."

"I have not seen you for two days," answered the Pope. "Come a little nearer; sit down in this easy chair and give me your hand."

Olimpia obeyed, placing her hand in that of the Pontiff. He trembled a little, which was often the case whenever he was experiencing great emotion caused either by some feeling of pleasure or of anger. "I missed you," he continued, "do not stay away so long, my dear sister, without coming to see me and help me with your enlightened judgment. It is a very long time since I told you for the first time that I could not decide anything without your advice."

"Your Holiness exaggerates," modestly replied Donna Olimpia.

"Please, my dear sister, drop these court formulas," exclaimed the Pontiff, "we are alone here—call me brother!"



"Yes, yes, dear brother," said Olimpia again, placing her beautiful hands upon those of the Pontiff, those hands which were wont to shower benedictions upon millions of Christians, "do not excite yourself, and let us talk of matters which concern your interest."

Donna Olimpia was no longer young; but thanks to that privilege which nature has granted to southern beauties, she had been charming and beautiful in early youth, and kept her good looks, majestic beauty, coupled with graceful bearing, at an age when many European women have already abandoned all claims to physical charm.

"Well," said His Holiness, leaning back in his chair, "tell us what is happening in our good city of Rome, and what are the Romans doing?"

"The Romans," replied the lady, with a slight note of contempt in her voice, "do not spare either you or me."

"Indeed! And what are they saying about us?" asked the Pope, accompanying his words by a loud chuckle.

A shade of annoyance passed over the mobile features of Donna Olimpia.

"Oh, you know what calumnies they are spreading, and what gross pleasantries they are indulging in, but here is a joke in Latin, aimed at myself only." She took a slip of paper from the packet she had brought with her, and handed it to Innocent. "Please do not read it to me," she added. "Your Holiness is aware that my education has been

neglected and that I have remained very ignorant and know not a word of Latin. I shall benefit by my lack of knowledge to ignore the gross joke and play upon words which has evidently been made with my name."

"But you must understand it," said the Pope. "It says: '*Olim—pia nunc impia.*'"

"This joke seems to have made its fortune," added Donna Olimpia, "not only among the rabble of Rome, but also in the palaces of foreign ambassadors."

The Pontiff grew serious.

"But I do not care," Donna Olimpia continued, "Let them exhaust their satires upon me and make me the butt of the poisonous shafts of their gross and vulgar jokes. I shall consider it my greatest happiness to receive any insults in the service of the Holy Church. We must not forget, Holy Father, that you are the ruler of the first Empire of the world and that we must, above all, have in mind the interests of the Church."

Donna Olimpia then proceeded to entertain Innocent X of grave state matters, and at last submitted to him a list of names of prelates whom she wished His Holiness to recompense with the cardinal's hat.

Among her protégés were her nephew Maldaichini, a boy of sixteen, and the Archbishop of Aix, brother of Mazarin, the Prime Minister of France.

"What?" exclaimed the Pontiff, "make a

brother of that monster a member of the 'Sacred College! And what will Rome nay Europe, say to this? Will it not be said that we have simply *Mazarinised* the government of the Church? Of course, the Ambassador of France will be pleased and very grateful to you for this favour, but Spain will be offended And your nephew! A lad of sixteen! Really, Olympia, you will only have to take possession of the Church of St John the Lateran, to exercise your power more completely over the Church and Christendom!

"My dear brother," rejoined Donna Olympia, "if you imagine for one moment that I am capable of plotting and scheming and that I have anything but your interest at heart, please let us drop this subject I should however, like to point out to your Holiness that the greater and the more extravagant the phantasies in which a sovereign seems to indulge the stronger his power and his hold over the vulgar masses It enhances the greatness of a sovereign in the eyes of the masses if he endeavour to do things which appear not only impossible but even absurd to his subjects It is the prerogative of his function and of his power to act and to behave differently from the masses A sovereign whose acts are only dictated by justice and reason will soon lose the prestige of his superiority with the majority of his subjects To be guided by common sense appears a common quality to the senseless masses Besides, continued Olympia "many of your predecessors have set you examples

## DONNA OLIMPIA

in raising boys of twelve and thirteen to the dignity of Cardinals."

Innocent shook his head. And the woman, afraid of meeting with an emphatic refusal to her request, took recourse to feminine weapons. She put on her cloak and prepared to go.

"It is late, Your Holiness," she said stiffly, "and I am going. May God grant your Holiness a good night." She was approaching the door.

"Olimpia," cried Innocent, "Olimpia, stay—give in."

She relented, and taking off her cloak came to kiss the hand of the Pontiff. Passion has a rejuvenating effect, and the countenance of Donna Olimpia shone with an incomparable beauty. The Pontiff felt an emotion which he could hardly dissimulate, and which, too, did not escape the watchful and quick eye of the lady. She smiled sweetly, a smile of hope and joy.

A few moments of silence followed, during which Donna Olimpia respectfully kissed the hand of Innocent. The woman had triumphed. The protégés whom she had proposed would be nominated Cardinals by His Holiness.

"Are you satisfied, madonna?" asked the Pontiff.

"My dear Pamphilius," replied Donna Olimpia affectionately, "whatever I do, whatever I insist upon your doing, I am guided solely by your interest and that of the Holy Church."

Who was this woman who was exercising such a

preponderating influence over the Vicar of Christ, and was practically ruling the Holy See in his name ?

Donna Olimpia was a Pompadour at the Court of Rome. Her influence over Innocent X was as great as if not greater than, that of *Madame de Maintenon* over Louis XIV, and that of the Marquise de Pompadour over Louis XV. She was of the race of Prime Ministers in petticoats, and in whom ambition is the most prominent passion. She was the daughter of Sforza Maldachini, a captain of the militia and of Vittoria Gurdieri. Her father was a comparatively poor man, and Olimpia, who was very handsome, had already in her early youth given proof of a prudence and a practical sense above her years.

Her parents had put her in a convent, but she escaped seeking the protection of one of her aunts. Her confessor, an Augustine monk, was approached and he, too, endeavoured to persuade her to take the veil. Tired of continual pressure and to escape the sermons of her Father Confessor, Olimpia accused the monk of having solicited her during confession. By order of the Tribunal of the Inquisition, the poor monk was arrested, thrown in prison, and six months later exiled from Rome. Years afterwards, when Donna Olimpia was the mighty favourite of His Holiness she made inquiries and, learning that her former confessor was vegetating in the vicinity of the Eternal City, commanded his presence.

"Are you still intent," she asked him, with a subtle smile, "upon making me pronounce the three vows?"

"Excellency," replied the poor monk, "my aim was to lead you upon the path of goodness, not of evil."

"Yes," she replied, "I know; but had I followed your advice, I would not be here to-day to ameliorate your position."

He was sent back to his convent, and a few days later was brought by the mighty lady to kiss the shoe of the Pope, who made the monk a bishop, to the amazement of the Court.

Olimpia had thus refused to enter a convent, and preferred to marry a rich man of Viterbo, who had the good grace to leave her a widow—with a little fortune of forty thousand Roman dollars, about £10,000. The two sons she had borne to him having died, she went to Rome, where she hoped—as a young and attractive widow—to make an advantageous match. Olimpia had been brought up in a poor family, and her education had been neglected, but she made up for the shortcomings of her erudition by the vivacity of her perspicacious mind and her sound and discerning judgment. Shortly after her establishment in Rome, she made the acquaintance of the illustrious family of Pamphili, occupying a very high place among the Roman aristocracy. Olimpia's beauty and the grace of her mind produced a deep impression upon Camillo, the eldest son of Prince Pamphilio. The noble

suitor for the hand of the charming widow was accepted and the marriage took place. Three children were the issue of this union. Many a woman would have been content with her good fortune and the title of Princess. Not so Donna Olympia. She looked upon her marriage as upon the first step to much higher power. And her dreams of ambition were destined to be realised even beyond her expectations thanks to her brother-in-law the second son of Prince Pamphilio.

John Baptist had entered the Church, had studied law and risen to high credit. He became Papal Nuncio at Naples and under the rule of Urban VIII was made cardinal. He was just but of a somewhat weak character and it was easy for a strong minded woman like Olympia to gain a preponderating ascendancy over him. The birth of her three children and six years of married life had familiarised Donna Olympia with her husband. She had been attracted by his good looks but her passion had worn off and now she began to notice the utter nonentity of Prince Pamphilio. He was a handsome Roman Prince, generous, affable and courteous to his wife but possessed none of the qualities which would enable him—thanks to his high position and his rank—to play an important role in the State. He was fond of beautiful pictures, was a passionate lover of music and even played one or two instruments—qualities which his wife completely lacked. Intellectual intercourse became almost impossible between the two. It therefore

the intimacy existing between his wife and his brother, and that he watched them and soon learned the truth! So great was his despair that he fell ill, and soon died! Public opinion accused Donna Olimpia of having poisoned her husband, but the proofs were lacking, and the matter was allowed to drop after a while. Donna Olimpia's and her brother-in-law's friendship grew much stronger, and the ambitious woman made the latter's interests her own, carefully watching every event which could be utilised to his benefit. She was his friend and guide, advising him in everything, and became absolute mistress of all his actions. During his stay as Papal Nuncio at the Court of Madrid, John Baptist addressed a letter to Olimpia which clearly indicated to what an extent his friendship for her had grown.

"My dearest sister-in-law, wrote the future Pontiff, "my negotiations in Spain are far from meeting with the same success as those I managed in Rome, for here I am deprived of your valuable counsel. Away from you, I am like a ship without the helm. I confess it quite frankly stimulated as I am by my deep sense of gratitude for all that I owe unto you.

Naturally, when the contents of this letter became public, thanks to some unscrupulous servant the enemies of Donna Olimpia did not fail to comment upon the friendship existing between the Papal Nuncio and herself. But this woman possessed the patient courage peculiar to those devoured by am-



bition.\* To counterbalance the popular insults and gross jokes, she augmented her gifts to the convents and the distribution of alms to the poor, and whilst the Cardinal Pamphilio was in Spain and in France, Olimpia watched over his interests in Rome. She regularly kept him well-informed of all that could further their interests, and often she gave receptions in her sumptuous apartments, where the most influential prelates and secular grandees gathered. She thus accustomed the Roman nobility to frequent her palace, where they were soon to greet her as a sovereign, and her ambition filled out her breast, so that there remained scarcely room for any other sentiment. She showed little love for her daughters, for each of whom, however, she concluded an advantageous match. The eldest daughter, Camilla, married the Marquis *Giustiniani*, whilst the younger, Constance, was wedded to Nicolas Luidovisi, prince of Piombino. Her son she seemed to dislike. He had inherited the temperament of his father, was indolent and inactive. And instead of endeavouring to remedy his natural faults by a good education, the mother seemed to leave him purposely in ignorance. It was evident that she was jealous of her own son, and, foreseeing the day when her friend, or lover, Pamphilio, would become Pontiff, she studiously wished to incapacitate the boy from occupying an influential position at the Court of his uncle, and thus diminish her own power. In this respect our mind reverts to another mother in whose breast

"Perhaps the Cardinal has not yet spoken to Donna Olimpia."

Donna Olimpia continually endeavoured to impress her brother-in-law with the fact that if a Cardinal could be appointed on the strength of his personal merit, intrigues were absolutely necessary in the election of the Pope. And she always gave him as example Sixtus V, who had feigned imbecility, in order to be elected Pope by the Conclave. After a reign of twenty-two years, the last years of which had seemed centuries to the ambitious Donna Olimpia, Urban VIII died, and although in the course of the ten days which elapsed between the demise of the Pontiff and the entry of the Cardinals into Conclave, nothing had seemed to indicate that Cardinal Pamphilio would be elected. Donna Olimpia had a sure presentiment that her brother-in-law would be Pope. Passionate souls are often superstitious. This woman, who had been watching and expecting the end of Urban VIII, had one day consulted an astrologer concerning the future of her friend, the Cardinal. She received the reply that at the age of seventy he would reach the highest dignity of the Church. As Innocent was only sixty-six, Donna Olimpia for four years had Masses read for the life of Urban. And as the death of the latter occurred just at the moment when her brother-in-law had reached his seventieth birthday, Donna Olimpia felt almost sure that he would be elected Pope.

After the death of Urban VIII, Donna Olimpia

employed all her power to influence the Conclave in favour of her brother in law. The night preceding the opening of the Conclave Pamphilio had a long conference with Olympia. In the morning when he was leaving the palace she said: "When I see you again you will perhaps be Pope."

"If I desire this honour," replied the Cardinal, "it is in order to share it with you." "And let me hasten to add that Innocent X kept his word. He not only shared the Pontifical dignity with his sister in law, but the mighty favourite practically ruled in his stead, and it was she who was the Popess of Rome. The Conclave lasted for some time, and at last Pamphilio was elected Pope."

There is an old custom in Rome which allows the populace to pillage the palace of the Cardinal elected Pope, and as a remuneration of this ancient custom the new Pontiff had to throw 15,000 gold crowns among the crowd. Gregory XIII had decided to distribute the money among the poor, and so sure was this woman of the elevation of Cardinal Pamphilio that she had transferred all the wealth accumulated in the palace of her brother in law to a place of safety.

Innocent's chances had at first been very small. He was not a favourite with the members of the Sacred College—he was not interested in art, science, or literature. Moreover the heretics and reformers were severely criticising the morals of the Catholic clergy, and the electors were afraid that Cardinal Pamphilio's intimate

friendship with Donna Olimpia would—as soon as he was proclaimed Pontiff—become a European scandal. And yet Donna Olimpia did not despair. She surrounded herself with spies and informers, knew what was going on, spread false rumours and reports, adroitly managed to bring home to most of the members of the Sacred College their private life, which was far from being blameless—and especially to represent the danger for Rome if a Pope favourable to France were elected. And indeed, political reasons triumphed over moral considerations. Pamphilio was elected in 1644 under the name of Innocent X.

On receiving the news, Donna Olimpia felt an immense joy; but so great was her control over her emotions that she outwardly manifested no sign of elation. And when she heard the mob approaching the palace of the Cardinal to pillage its contents, she smiled at this first acknowledgment of her lover's dignity. She herself opened the doors, throwing silver coins among the masses, and with a smile of triumph on her countenance watched them taking possession and devastating the old and valueless furniture which she had not removed. Some malicious Romans had noticed, however, the trick she had played upon them, and the precaution she had taken.

"If Donna Olimpia leaves the Vatican in a similar state," they exclaimed, "then woe unto the Church."

On the statue of Pasquino, upon which the wit of

the period enjoyed the privilege of ridiculing everything and making biting jokes details were given of the removal of the Cardinal and a description of the apartment which Donna Olimpia was to occupy in the Vatican

On the first day of his elevation business transactions compelled the new Pontiff to receive only those people with whom he had to settle affairs of State But scarcely had the result of the election been announced when the Roman nobility the ambassadors of foreign powers, cardinals prelates and ladies of distinction hastened to present their congratulations to Donna Olimpia She received them with the air of a sovereign graciously acknowledging the homage of her subjects She excused herself for the disorder reigning in the palace and her inability to receive her guests more properly Many a malicious question was put and many a malicious remark exchanged by this distinguished lady behind the back of the now powerful lady but to her face only protestations of respect and congratulations were offered

The busy and eventful day was at an end It was ten o'clock and Donna Olimpia slipped out from her palace and directed her steps towards the Vatican Appearing in the presence of Innocent she fell on her knees and kissed the feet of the Vicar of Christ weeping tears of joy The Pope himself was so moved that he could not keep back his own tears It was midnight when Donna Olimpia left the palace of the Pontiff but before leaving she passed

through the apartments and saw that everything was in order for the comfort of her friend. It had long been her habit to study his comforts and his wants, and she carefully administered to his requirements and looked after him with almost maternal care. Donna Olimpia was everything to the newly elected Pontiff. She was prime minister, adviser, friend, and housekeeper—all in one.

Once her power established, this Pompadour at the Court of Rome did her best to undermine the authority of those who could become dangerous to her in the future. Her ambitious jealousy extended even to her own son.

During the first years of the pontificate of his uncle Don Camillo Pamphilio, son of Donna Olimpia, constructed a magnificent villa on the outskirts of Rome. The mother had purposely accustomed the son to indolence and inactivity, and left him in ignorance. Two months after the accession of Innocent, Don Camillo was made Cardinal and Donna Olimpia thus hoped to avail herself of her son as of a kind of puppet whom she would use as an instrument in her hands. But at the very moment when his mother was making these plans, the young man frustrated all her efforts—thanks to an event which Donna Olimpia could not very well have foreseen. Donna Olimpia was jealous of the influence of the Pope's trusted adviser and minister, Pancirolo. She thus hoped to substitute the Cardinal-Nephew in his stead, whom she would guide according to her wishes. Her son

was busy constructing his villa, which soon became the talk of the town of Rome. And he was more often in conference with his architect, the young artist Algardi, than with ambassadors and ministers.

Camillo was a typical representative of the educated Italian nobility. He was intelligent rather than *spirituel* and loved instinctively all beautiful things—art, music and the recitation of verse—without, however, posing as an art connoisseur or critic. On the contrary, his ignorance added *grace* and *originality* to his inclinations. He was of a candid character and frank nature, which his education, or rather lack of education, had not spoiled. Accustomed to opulence from his early youth, he availed himself of his wealth to indulge in innocent pleasures. He was perfectly unaware of the fact that he was occupying—in name at least—the highest office at the Papal Court, and having allowed himself to be made cardinal in obedience to his mother he employed the revenues attached to his office to accelerate the construction of his villa. The fame of this villa had spread over Italy and the number of visitors coming to inspect the beautiful building and the gardens was considerable. The Cardinal rather than go to the Vatican remained at his villa to receive the curious and the guests who came to admire.

It was at that period that Cornelia Aldo-Brandini Princess de Rossano widow of Paul Borghese, came to Rome. She had heard everybody praising the newly constructed villa and expressed the wish to

visit the building and the gardens. The Cardinal was only too delighted to grant her the required permission, and was himself present to receive her and take her round the gardens. The Princess de Rossano was still very young and, moreover, considered one of the most beautiful women of her time. Her physical beauty was coupled with a cultured mind, a noble character, and irreproachable moral conduct, a rare quality in those days of the seventeenth century. The beauty of the charming widow produced a deep impression upon the heart and mind of the young prelate. His admiration for her was manifest, and the Princess in her turn did not dissimulate her liking for him. Cardinal Camillo was in love; and, what is more, he was—or at least was assured that he was—loved in return. He became the shadow of the beautiful lady, and Roman society enjoyed the spectacle of an ecclesiastical *soupirant* at the feet of a noble and charming widow.

The Pope and Donna Olimpia were furious. This Cardinal-Nephew in love like a school-boy was too ridiculous a spectacle, and had to be stopped. But the authority of uncle and mother had found a match in the obstinacy of the young lover and the cleverness of his lady-love. The Princess had informed her relation, the Prince of Parma, of her love-affair, and plainly hinted that it would be greatly to her advantage from every point of view social and pecuniary, to marry the nephew of the Pope. She gave Camillo many opportunities to



meet her, advised him to be circumspect in dealing with the obstacles which his mother was putting in the way of their union. She encouraged and inflamed the already ardent lover to such an extent that the latter, hitherto so submissive to the Pontiff and to his mother, openly rebelled against their authority, and categorically declared that he would renounce his ecclesiastical dignities and wed the Princess. Indeed, he returned his cardinal's hat, and, in spite of the objections of his mother and of Innocent, married the lady of his love.

Donna Olimpia was a woman, and with a woman's instinct she felt that her daughter-in-law would become a dangerous rival. Innocent would sooner or later be touched by the beauty and the grace of his niece and forgive the couple their marriage. Moreover, the young princess would endeavour to gain an ascendancy over the Pontiff—and the Papal Pompadour trembled for her power.

Future events, indeed, showed that her fears had been only too well founded. For the present, however, Donna Olimpia was all-powerful and she prevailed upon the Pope to exile the rebellious lovers from the Eternal City. The astonishment of society at this rigorous punishment was great; but many had guessed the true cause of it.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PRINCESS ROSSANO, FAVOURITE OF POPE INNOCENT X

TEN months had the couple passed in exile, when the young wife suddenly found that she had had enough of vegetating in the country. She knew, through her spies and friends, that it was only her mother-in-law who kept her in exile, and far away from Court and capital. She decided openly to defy the all-powerful minister in petticoats.

"Camillo," she said one day to her husband, "I have heard that the Pontiff is anxious to find an opportunity for calling us back, but that it is only your mother who is keeping us in exile. As long as she will wield any power the Pope is sure to abide by her decision. Your uncle will never master courage enough to contradict her—and we may remain where we are for an indefinite period. But I am tired of this life ; and it is absurd to have married the nephew of the Pontiff to live away from the Court, in the country. I have therefore decided to return to Rome ; and it is in the Eternal City where I wish to give birth to my son !"

"But, my dear Cornelia," rejoined the Prince, "we need only write to His Holiness, and I am sure that he will grant us your request."

"Not at all," replied his wife "I have decided otherwise We shall go to Rome without asking permission"

Her husband looked pained and surprised

"You do not seem to approve of my plan?" queried the Princess

"Your plan—say rather your folly," was the rejoinder of the Prince

The Princess was piqued

"There are follies," she at once retorted "which are often preferable to acts of prudence, especially when the former are the result of a noble pride and the latter the outcome of indolence"

The Prince was too much in love with his wife to contradict her, but fear of his mother was still paramount in his breast With tears in his eyes he implored his wife the Princess to abandon her reckless plan

"Imagine," he said "the consequences of such a step the wrath and anger of Donna Olimpia, she is all powerful in Rome one word from her and we are lost"

"Really" replied his wife "to judge from the terror your mother seems to inspire you with I begin to think that I shall never obtain anything from you unless I become as imperious as your mother Henceforth I shall change my attitude, and I now emphatically inform you that I am going to Rome"

The Princess accordingly went to Rome, and held

a triumphal entry. Cries of " Long live the Princess de Rossano " greeted her passage, and large crowds had gathered to witness her carriage pass. Soon the vivats addressed to the Princess mingled with cries : " Down with Donna Olimpia ! " The Pontiff and his sister-in-law had been informed of the event, and of all the details of the ovation accorded to the Princess. Innocent at first went into a violent rage and was on the point of giving orders to expel the young lady from Rome, but he was dissuaded from doing so by his treasurer, his old and trusted adviser, Pancirolo, who pointed out to him that such an act would lead to grave and even dangerous consequences.

" Your Holiness ought to be aware," argued this statesman, " that such an order carried out against a young and beautiful woman belonging to one of the best families, a lady who is your niece and, moreover, who is *enroute*, will exasperate the people of Rome in the highest degree, and may lead to a riot, if not a revolution. And the relatives of the Princess, especially the Duke of Parma, will undoubtedly not let such an insult pass without taking his revenge."

The Pontiff's wrath abated. Besides, he was always indulgent towards the Princess whenever he grew tired of the ascendancy of Donna Olimpia. He gave in, adding, however

" You will see, this little madcap will give us trouble."

And indeed he was right in his presentiment :

for early the next morning Donna Olimpia appeared at the Vatican

"Well, Your Holiness," she began, "you will now admit that the precautions I have often advised Your Holiness to take against this little princess were dictated by prudence. Your Holiness is now disobeyed, insulted in the Eternal City! I hope that strict measures have already been taken and orders given to punish severely such an act of disobedience on the part of my daughter-in-law. For such insolence against the Sovereign Pontiff cannot be sufficiently punished."

"Measures have already been taken," replied Innocent, somewhat evasively, "to make the government of the Holy See respected."

"There is only one way of assuring respect," rejoined Donna Olimpia. "First of all, this woman must leave Rome at once."

"No," replied Innocent, in a firm tone. "Such orders will *not* be given, and if any one has *dared* to give them," he added meaningly, "they will *not* be executed."

Donna Olimpia was amazed! Was her reign at an end? Was Innocent, after so many years, desirous of shaking off her influence? Was that little minx going to supplant her? She changed her tone.

"My brother—she addressed Innocent in her most affectionate accents—"do not forget that your authority has been ignored; that you have been insulted, and that you owe it to your high

office to punish the Princess. Far be it from me to cause you pain, but I am anxious to see your Holy Person respected and your commands obeyed—and—believe me, your indulgence is misplaced; it will only be considered as weakness in this case, because a young and pretty woman is the culprit."

"Is not your severity," replied Innocent, not without irony in his voice, "is not your severity stimulated by your jealousy?"

Donna Olimpia lost her temper.

"If you are decided to forgive the Princess her behaviour I assure you that I am not going to stand her insolence, and I shall not remain in the same town with her."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Order her to leave Rome."

The Pontiff pleaded with his tyrant for her own daughter-in-law. He pointed out how dangerous such a step would be, what the world would say if, for a simple offence like this, they were to expel from Rome the Princess, who was *encomte*; and that Donna Olimpia was making a mountain out of a mole-hill.

But the woman would not be persuaded

"One would almost imagine," at last exclaimed the Pontiff, "that you are very jealous of the success which the beauty of your daughter-in-law has achieved."

"And were it not for your age," promptly replied Donna Olimpia, "I should feel inclined to attribute your defence of the woman to a sentiment other than

could be firm. Donna Olimpia had pleaded in vain, and the Pontiff at last cut short the conversation by categorically declaring that what she was asking for was impossible.

"It is unjust, and my decision remains unshakeable."

He pronounced his last words with unwonted firmness and even vehemence; and for once the minister in petticoats understood that she had lost. She was deeply humiliated and annoyed; but with her usual tact and prudence she suddenly grew calm, manifesting no outward signs of her inner emotions. She even pretended to agree with His Holiness, in whose judgment and discretion she had implicit faith. And with conflicting emotions, fear, envy, raging in her heart, she took leave of the Pontiff.

Scarcely had the favourite quitted the presence of Innocent, when the latter vehemently exclaimed with an anger utterly unpapal, "Curse those women and those who send them."

Poor Pope Innocent had to suffer the outbursts of feminine jealousy also from another quarter. Whilst Donna Olimpia was jealous of the pretty Princess, the Pontiff's elder sister felt a grudge against the favourite. The Pope loved his elder sister, Agatha, mother-superior of a convent; and the latter, although very humble and very submissive in the presence of her Holy Brother, could at times take a tone of authority—as elder sisters of great men are wont to; and she not unfrequently obtained special favours from His Holiness. She

was loquacious and clever at begging, like all the women who had passed their lives in a convent Donna Olimpia who had her eye upon the movements and visits of Agatha, had given orders to the servants at the Vatican most of whom were her creatures and devoted to her, to get rid as often as possible of the old woman and not to admit her into the presence of the Pope.

But it was not always easy to send the old nun away ! She would raise her voice and quarrel with the servants shouting at the top of her voice that she had a right to see her brother. Her screams would reach the ears of the Pontiff and he could not very well refuse her admittance. Agatha would then reproach her young (!) brother with his injustice. The favours which by right belonged to her—his flesh and blood—were showered upon a stranger—upon this woman, who had accumulated such wealth and whose palace contained so many treasures robbed from Holy Church and for whose benefit did this woman employ her riches ? Not for the house and for the family of Pamphilio—not even for her own son no ! she was working for the greatness and the glory of the house of Maldechini. She was sending to Viterbo to her relations all the wealth which ought never to have been taken out of Rome. Thus in the Church of St Agnes in the Piazza Navona the bones of *Sainte Françoise* of Rome had been exhumed and a shoulder of the saint preserved as relic. A great and solemn ceremony had accompanied this event and a



splendid banquet offered at the Capitol to all that Rome counted of distinguished people. Now, both women, Donna Olimpia and Agatha, were anxious to possess this precious relic. The former intended to present it to the Church of San Martino, a small principality near Viterbo, in possession of her brother, Prince San Martino, and whose title and states she hoped to inherit, while Agatha coveted the relic for her own convent. The possession of a relic greatly enhanced the celebrity of a church or of a convent, often became the source of considerable revenue, and greatly hastened the rise of the establishment. Strange as it may sound, when the Pope had made a gift of the holy relic to his favourite, his sister was more annoyed at this triumph of her rival than at many more important favours bestowed upon Donna Olimpia.

And on this particular morning Agatha forced the door of her brother. After prostrating herself and devoutly kissing the slipper of His Holiness, the devout Catholic and pious nun gave way to the elder sister in her, and it was her younger brother whom she now treated to a long lecture, reproaching him with his weakness for Donna Olimpia. She not only told him freely—in voluble and forcible language—what she herself thought of his conduct and of his scandalous attachment for the ambitious woman, but, with evident malice, she repeated all the scandalous rumours and insults circulating in Rome on the subject of the intimacy existing between the Vicar of Christ and his sister-in-law.

Nun Agatha exhausted all that the enemies of the Church, all that the calumniators and satirists had spread about this friendship. She repeated everything, and, although greatly exaggerated, these accusations contained a great deal of truth in them. Innocent looked like a schoolboy, caught *in flagrante delicto* and preserved an embarrassed silence. The nun, perceiving her advantage, continued

"Your conduct is making you the byword of Rome, of Italy, and of the whole of Europe. It is only the evil spirit who is prompting you to act thus, so as to further the designs of the heretics, the reformers, and the enemies of Rome and the Holy Church. Are you aware of the epithet bestowed upon this woman? They apply to her the stigma used in the Apocalypse, and among the heretics she is described as the Harlot of Babylon. In their sermons the ecclesiastics of the Church of Satan are thundering against 'this great prostitute who dwells at Babylon the city on the seven hills.' And indeed, she concluded, triumphantly, are they not right, those preachers of Satan? For does not this woman in reality govern Rome and Christendom and are you not heaping upon her all the favours imaginable?"

"My good sister" at last replied the Pontiff, "I shall take your good counsel to heart and act upon it as soon as I judge the occasion propitious."

"Thank you, my brother," exclaimed the old woman. "Send away Donna Olimpia, and the whole world will bless you."

Was he growing tired of the empire she was exercising over him? But the Pontiff was seriously thinking of getting rid of Donna Olimpia. He was only lacking the courage of coming to a decision. So great was the power of this woman over the head of Christianity that whatever his decisions, he dared not face her, nor break definitely with her. To complicate his embarrassment, the Pontiff fell ill. He was subject to such attacks, which—especially when he had experienced some anger and annoyance—assumed a serious and even dangerous character. During these attacks of the Pontiff, Rome was in a state of extreme excitement, and the passions dwelling in the breasts of the ambitious, to whom a change on the throne of St. Peter meant so much, were let loose in those moments. Many hopes were attached to the election of a new Pontiff, many fortunes vanished with the demise of the old Pope, or were built on the accession of the new. But it would be unjust to affirm that Donna Olimpia was utterly and entirely governed by selfish motives; and if ambition was the prime motor of her actions, she had a certain attachment for the person of her august brother-in-law. No sooner had the rumour of the illness of Innocent spread in Rome and reached her ears than she was at his bedside. And it is to the credit of this woman, whose mind was always apparently bent upon grave matters of State, and who judged and decided the most complicated political affairs with a skill that would have done honour to the cleverest politician,

that she became an affectionate domestic helpmate as soon as Innocent lay ill. Attentive, careful, and devoted like a hospital nurse, she never left his sick chamber—prepared his medicine herself, tending him with the greatest possible care, watching his movements, and eager to spare him the slightest pain, ready to perform every service his state of health necessitated. She only left his bedside for rare moments to give orders for Masses to be read in the churches or to consult with the physician of His Holiness.

Innocent seemed to be suffering more than usually, and his nurse, who from long experience knew exactly the nature of his illness, soon perceived that this time grief had enhanced his pain. She increased her vigilance and her care. The Pontiff was not insensible to her attentions; for several times during his illness he shed tears, pressing the hand of his favourite. And yet when the acute pain had passed, Donna Olimpia noticed with a feeling of melancholy that His Holiness was not so exuberant in his gratitude as on previous occasions. He was evidently tormented by the promise he had given to his sister on the one hand, and the constant remonstrances of his aged treasurer on the other. In reality, he had allowed Donna Olimpia to take care of him, but he regretted this incident, which again made him dependent upon the woman.

Could he break with her now? could he coldly tell her not to return to the Vatican, and that henceforth he would do without her counsel? Olimpia

evidently read what was going on in the mind of the Pontiff. She felt that her fall was only a question of months, weeks, or even days ; and the nearer the Pope approached convalescence the sadder she grew, and the servants at the Vatican, and even the visitors who came to inquire after the health of the Vicar of Christ, were struck with the extreme pallor and melancholy of the favourite. She was regretting the power which she felt was slipping from her hands.

As yet, however, Innocent could not make up his mind to tell her plainly his decision, and when he was convalescent he thanked her for her devotion ; and handing her a splendid ring set with precious stones, of a considerable value, he delicately pointed out to her the necessity of returning to her own palace.

" Take this ring, Olimpia," he added, " as a slight souvenir of my gratitude for your service, and allow me to join to it another gift in recompense for your good and valuable counsel in the past. Have these boxes, containing about 20,000 Roman dollars (c. £5,000), carried to your carriage."

Donna Olimpia was not a woman to refuse such a gift, and she accepted it. But she could not help feeling that this delicate conduct on the part of Innocent was only a presage of her speedy misfortune. And when she left the Vatican she turned back to look at the walls of the historic building as if bidding farewell to the Palace where she was no longer to rule.

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But Donna Olimpia was not one of those women who calmly take their *congé*. And to do her justice, one must admit that she was not an ordinary woman. Even in her misfortune she knew how to preserve her dignity and presence of mind. And so great was her influence that although her enemies inwardly rejoiced, they did not dare to defy her openly.

An occasion soon offered itself for Donna Olimpia to show her pertinacity of spirit.

The Pope had decided to convene a council of the Sacred College with a view to treating urgent matters of State. As a rule, Donna Olimpia, in the happy days of her favour, used to be present at those councils and take part in the deliberations of the Cardinals. Sometimes, however, she used to watch these meetings unseen remaining hidden in a cabinet leading into the Papal chamber, and where she could hear everything, but not be seen. And when in the end the discussions took a turn which she did not appreciate she would suddenly make a dramatic entry among the Cardinals and take an active part in their debate. It was only on rare occasions that she contented herself with the rôle of invisible listener. As she had received no instruction whether to be present or not at this council, she at once decided to be in her place of hiding, and watch the proceedings. "She would preside over the council" as one of the Cardinals once expressed himself, "like a saint from her corner."



After having treated several important affairs, Fabio Chigi, who had just returned from his post as Nuncio at Cologne, pointed out the advisability of punishing severely the disorders, transgressions, and crimes of the Roman Catholic clergy. "During my stay at Cologne and Munster," continued the prelate, "I have had occasion to listen to the criticisms and vile attacks made upon the Roman Catholic clergy by the Protestants. It is in the interest of all those who have remained faithful and attached to the Holy Roman Church to see the evil eradicated and thus enhance the dignity of Papacy. We ought to begin by thoroughly reforming the convents, which have become centres of immorality and of sin."

"Leave those poor monks alone," interrupted Cardinal Sforza, who had particular reasons for hating Donna Olimpia. "The root of the evil is not to be sought among the lower clergy. The reforms must come from above, and if *we* set a good example the others will soon imitate us."

All present knew what Cardinal Sforza was alluding to, and in embarrassed silence looked at the Pontiff.

"She is present, in here," some whispered into the ear of the bold speaker.

"I know," he replied, "and that is the reason why I am talking so loud: I want her to hear me."

"Your Holiness," continued Cardinal Sforza, "the Holy See has become the butt of bitter reproaches and the subject of infamous satires."

And not only have the authors of these satires not been punished, but their accusations and gross jokes are being repeated everywhere—not only in Rome, but all over Europe Christendom is shocked at the state of the Roman Church, ruled by a woman. In London the Roman Pontiff has become the subject of derision and of popular ridicule. Only recently a comedy, entitled *The Marriage of the Pope*, has been played before Cromwell. The person of the Pontiff and the sacred Roman Church are travestied, a sacrilege committed in the Eternal City is already known all over Europe, and I must inform His Holiness of the fact," added the Cardinal, turning to the assembly, "if those whose duty it is to do so have kept it secret."

Sforza seemed to hesitate for a moment, as if afraid of offending the Pontiff by repeating the nature of the offence.

The Pope, who had remained silent during the speech of Sforza, his head leaning back on his chair and his gaze lost in the distance, suddenly looked up.

"Continue Cardinal," he said in a husky voice. "What has happened?"

"On the portals of several churches of Rome the name of Your Holiness, the Sovereign Pontiff Innocent, has been erased and that of Donna Olimpia inscribed in its stead, and it seems, Your Holiness, that this sacrilege has been committed with the knowledge of foreign Courts. Indeed, as far as I

have been able to ascertain, several Catholic ambassadors have been aiding and abetting this scandal, thus protesting and expressing their indignation at the state of affairs."

The features of the Pope were convulsed, whilst horror was depicted on the countenance of all present.

"But even the Emperor of Germany, Ferdinand," continued the Cardinal unabashed, "is not unaware of this scandal, and he even approves some of the attacks hurled against the Holy See. My friend Astalli, the Cardinal-Nephew, has received some other proofs corroborating my statements."

The Pontiff looked inquiringly at Astalli, and the latter, with a show of some reluctance, produced several medals, some in copper, others in silver, whilst two were rather large and in gold, having the value of at least twenty Roman crowns. With small variations all of them represented the same subject. On one side one could see the effigy of Olimpia with the Papal crown on her head and the keys of St. Peter in her hands, whilst on the other was the head of Innocent, his hair arranged in feminine fashion.

"These I received this morning. They have been distributed all over Rome, and among the foreign Courts; and to judge from the workmanship and the expense which the medals must have necessitated, there remains little doubt as to the source whence they emanate. I have not the slightest doubt but that they have been executed at the

expense of His Majesty the Emperor Ferdinand.

The Pope looked as if thunderstruck, and he scarcely had strength enough to make a feeble motion with his hand indicating that the meeting was at an end.

Donna Olimpia had heard enough and scarcely had the Cardinals left the presence of His Holiness when she rushed out from her hiding place fell on her knees, kissing the feet of the Pontiff. It took some time before Innocent as if awakening from a deep sleep looked around and perceiving the kneeling favourite uttered in a tone of reproach and astonishment

'What! You?

"Holy Father" replied the ambitious woman still hoping to escape the danger which was threatening her. "I am ready to obey your commands."

Innocent did not answer but his silence clearly indicated to his sister in law that he wished her to go.

In spite of the secret vexation which Donna Olimpia felt at no longer enjoying open favour at Court she was too clever not to hide it. She even pretended to be resigned and hoped to gain advantages from her apparent resignation. Among those who since her half disgrace seemed to have gained the confidence of the Pope the young and beautiful Princess de Rossano gave her most uneasiness and really her influence was very great. It was to her that one had to apply in order to get

favours from the Pontiff, and she generally obtained what she asked.

Innocent, although Pontiff, had contracted the habit of being surrounded by women.

In his youth Cardinal Pamphilio had been a Don Juan, like many of his predecessors and successors on the Papal throne. He had also recognised the fact that the friendship of influential Court ladies is always exceedingly useful to an ambitious politician, statesman or even prelate. And when in Madrid he did his very best to become a favourite of the great ladies and even of *ces petites dames* who enjoyed the reputation of possessing mighty friends at Court. As Papal Nuncio at the Court of Spain, Innocent had also played a prominent part in a love affair of King Philip IV, and the Calderona. La Calderona was a famous actress, fascinating rather than beautiful, *troublante, spirituelle*, and possessed of a voice of gold. The King fell in love with the charming actress, *tout comme chez nous*. And the Queen of the stage became his mistress. But alas! one day His Majesty found the unfaithful lady in the arms of the Duke de Medina de las Torres, and in a paroxysm of jealousy and rage he was on the point of killing his rival when la Calderona threw herself between her two lovers. Philip forgave her, sent the Duke into exile and the lady into a convent. Such was the custom of Spain, that the lady whom His Majesty has ceased to honour with his love must give up the life of love and joy and retire within the walls of a convent, there to reflect

at leisure upon the inconstancy of Princes and their ingratitude.

Magdalen-Calderona took the veil from the hands of the Apostolic Nuncio who afterwards became Pope Innocent X. In his later years his infirmity, which began early, and which increased with age, made many little daily precautions indispensable for the Pope, and the constant attentions of Donna Olimpia for a good many years had become necessary, because Innocent felt he must be assisted, consoled, and even served by a woman. Since his sister-in-law had been obliged to retire from the Court, his young niece, the heiress, so to speak, of a part of her domestic duties, softened the frequent sufferings of her uncle by the charm of naturally brilliant conversation, which the many relations whom the young Princess entertained in Rome made either interesting or important. Since the retreat of Donna Olimpia the nephews and nieces of Innocent had been lodged in the Vatican. Don Camillo, the Prince of Piombino and Giustiniani, with their wives, occupied different apartments in the Palace, so that the Pontiff enjoyed a repose sweeter, because new to him.

The Princess de Rossano had the gift of pleasing all who came near her. Her charms, her generosity, the care she took to maintain unity in her family attracted all hearts. As for her ambition, she only desired to enjoy the privileges of her rank and to use her power with the Pope to render service to those she esteemed, to help people of merit who found

themselves without support, and to use her riches to benefit others. Quite a stranger to anything that resembled intrigue, in reality she was only a romantic woman, dreaming of good and not even thinking of evil. Although she enjoyed the Pope's good favour and acquired by this position a certain authority in Rome, Donna Olimpia did not fear her as a rival: long experience had taught Innocent's sister-in-law that by being just and by rewarding virtue and merit, one excites good-will and sometimes admiration; that these advantages are barren in everyday life, and that only the creatures that one has understood to make by monstrous favours are those on whom one can really count in moments of importance for energy and fidelity. So she attached but little importance to the passing influence that the Princess exercised just then in the political world; and although her woman's heart could not patiently endure the kind attentions with which the Pope daily surrounded her young and beautiful rival, however, always dominated by her insatiable love of power, alone in her palace, and holding in check the impulse of her jealous passions, Donna Olimpia brought her mind to bear upon her heart with the idea of turning to her profit all that caused her such grief.

And thus while in the Vatican the Pope enjoyed all the sweetness of family life by the cares and attentions of the Princess de Rossano, Donna Olimpia, in her solitude, threw on this basis, weak in appearance, the foundation of the schemes by

means of which she hoped to preserve and strengthen, if possible, the grandeur and importance of the House of Pamphili—of which she looked upon herself, quite rightly, as the strongest support. Disengaging herself with strength of character from personal affection, which might have caused her to turn aside from her object, she fed her mind on that which she most dreaded, namely the death of Innocent X. His demise was for her the whole question of her existence. An abyss opened between the death of her brother-in-law and the elevation of his successor, where she knew she would be engulfed if the means of getting across were not found, and these she meant to try to find.

For a long time Donna Olimpia had been worried by the dissensions which had separated all the members of her family, feeling herself quite unable to bring about the reconciliation of such different characters, the greater number possessing neither greatness nor niceness. And now, in spite of the jealousy she felt towards the Princess de Rossano Donna Olimpia forgave her daughter-in-law for having usurped her place by the Pope, because of the happy result of her efforts to bring unity and peace in the family for unity was absolutely necessary if her schemes were to succeed.

The Pope lived, his health, although frequently disturbed by troublesome complaints, was still strong, but at length he reached his eighty-fourth year and Donna Olimpia did not rely upon illusions. First this 'woman-sponge' as she had been styled,



tried to increase as much as possible her enormous wealth during the remainder of her brother-in-law's life, and then to augment the number of her creatures in the Sacred College and among the nobles whose influence in the next Conclave would be favourable to her, by electing a new Pontiff interested to show himself indulgent towards her. Then she wished to ensure the future of the House of the Pamphili—by associating it to a rich illustrious family destined to see one of its members elevated to the Papal throne, or at least powerful enough to protect the heiress of Innocent X against the future Pontiff. This, then, was the problem which this Pontifical Minerva was trying to solve, and that the Princess de Rossano, without her knowledge, was beginning to unravel, in surrounding Innocent X with his nephews and nieces and with all the sweetness of family life.

In fact, the Prince de Piombino and the Prince de Giustiniani, without being precisely friends, no longer disliked meeting each other, since the place of meeting was the Palace of the Pope, where the Princess de Rossano attracted them by obtaining favours from their uncle.

The two young wives, the daughters of Donna Olimpia, the Princesses Clementia and Constantia, had become much more amiable, and felt better disposed towards their mother, since they no longer lived with her in the Villa Pamphili—and enjoyed entire freedom at the Vatican in the daily society of the Pope, their uncle, or with their sister-in-law, the Princess de Rossano.

Publicly Innocent had forbidden his sister-in-law to appear at the Vatican, but he had given her permission to visit him in secret. Rome soon knew that every night Donna Olimpia mysteriously left her palace to go to the Vatican. Everybody was aware that Minerva-Olimpia would soon regain her former power, and indeed the Pontiff soon threw off the mask and recalled his favourite, whose praises he never tired of singing. Triumphantlly Donna Olimpia again took up her position of *maîtresse en titre*.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TRIUMPH AND DEATH OF DONNA OLIMPIA

HAVING returned to the Pope, Donna Olimpia resumed her old customs, and divided her time between the attentions she paid to her brother-in-law and the pursuit of her own private and lucrative speculations. These were swollen by the distribution of Church appointments according to her own interest; so that during the two years which followed her return to the Court, she succeeded in amassing riches enough to enable her to look calmly at the future.

The Pope's health was giving way—and the doctors declared that he must abstain from all mental work—so that now he did everything through his sister-in-law.

She governed the daily life of the Pontiff. She invented a sort of ceremonial to give access to those whom it was impossible to refuse. The warnings of Antonio Barberini, on the bad disposition of the Spanish clergy, had been listened to more attentively, as Azzolini had been able to learn that two or three fanatic monks arrived recently from Barcelona at Rome, had boasted of having superior orders for ridding Christendom, at whatsoever price,

of a Spiritual Head who favoured heresy by his scandalous conduct. Poisonings were very common then at Rome and also in the whole of Europe and to prevent them Donna Olimpia visited the kitchens examined the food prepared for the Holy Father forbade the entrance to the kitchen to any but those who had charge of preparing the food and often she took the precaution of making animals take a portion of the food. These cares were not useless for herself as she took her meals nearly always with the Pope. Generally Pablo arranged a little table near the bed. In the beginning Donna Olimpia was content to wait upon the Pontiff but soon Innocent himself ordered his sister in law to be seated and to partake of his meal. Little feminine attentions were in vogue and this moment became for him the moment longed for all the morning and thought about agreeably at night. Innocent pointing to his sister in law used to say to his intimates

Without her I should have been dead long ago. One day a chamberlain saw the Pontiff pressing Donna Olimpia to his breast and saying My darling Olimpia I love you more than anything and I even prefer you to the Papal Crown.

mitted by Donna Olimpia, who, modifying these and dictating those, disposed of the sovereign power at her pleasure. As soon as a serious discussion began Donna Olimpia regretted that the Pope was worse, and commanded silence, when she was skilful enough to see that the thread of the discussion was not continued. As for those who came to besiege the palace-dady for favours, they had to address themselves to her, and God only knows the immense sums which entered the Pontifical treasury during the last days of Innocent X.

She insisted on the relations of the Pope visiting him regularly, but she counted their words and often dictated to them what they should say. "Do not fatigue His Holiness," she often said. "Absolute rest is expressly commanded by the doctors." And then she would push them from the room, requesting them to walk on tiptoe to avoid making a noise.

The Princess de Rossano came more often than the others. Emboldened by the tender benevolence of the Pontiff, she was less timid in the presence of Donna Olimpia. She entered the room one day when her mother-in-law, bending over the bed, held the Pope's hand. Donna Olimpia frowned at seeing herself surprised, but the young Princess said jokingly: "Oh Uncle, I am jealous of my mother-in-law; you keep all your tenderness for her; there is none left for me. I am displeased."

At these words the Pope looked vaguely at his niece, and perhaps he was suffering from absence of mind, or perhaps he was conscious of what he said,

when he uttered the words      The hand that has  
wounded me is the only hand that can heal me  
And his head fell upon his pillow

That is very gallant Holy Father said the Princess who made a sign to her mother in law that she thought Innocent at that moment was suffering from mental aberration

The two ladies left the bedside to talk more at their ease and Donna Olympia laid stress on the weakness of brain from which Innocent suffered At the same time she made up her mind to give very strict orders to the antechamber attendants to prevent the recurrence of such a scene But Innocent was dying Donna Olympia did her best to keep everybody away from the dying Pontiff In those days one could only see women in the corridors and in the apostolic apartments—some anxious to make the best of their power and others to see what could be done for the future For ten days Innocent lay unconscious and during that short period his sister in law pocketed half a million in selling favours and ecclesiastical functions When the Pope recovered his senses she brought into play all her usual resources to keep his attention After some tender speeches in which the tone of her voice did more than her words she called for two servants who helped the sick man to sit up then she gave him something to drink and entertained him with different subjects Algardi's colossal statue the fountains of the Piazza Navona the ornamentation of the Pamphili Palace and the

beginning of the cupola of St. Agnes, led her to speak of the sums the building of this church cost, and the expense of finishing the same.

Innocent did not like doctors: and during his reign it had been *difficult for his sister-in-law to get* his permission for their presence at his meals, according to the etiquette of the Court. J. J. Baldini had succeeded to a certain Carlo Gomez, a Spanish doctor. Baldini had been rewarded for having cured the Pope of dysentery, but was dismissed some time after for having quite rightly opposed a journey that Innocent wished to make to Viterbo to rejoin Olimpia, who had gone there for some days.

Matteo Parisio, a skilful, sensible man, who, knowing that it was as impossible to cure the diseases of the Pope's body as the whims of his brain, tried to calm the pains caused by age, which nothing could cure. He pleased the Pope because he did not worry about medicine, and he was in the good books of Donna Olimpia because he ordered that the invalid should be spared all emotion and preoccupation. His advice satisfied both the patient and the lady who took charge of him.

Donna Olimpia conceived the idea of asking the doctor how long the Pope would live.

"How do you find him?" she asked one day.

"Just the same!"

"Neither better nor worse?"

"Ah, Princess," said Parisio, who knew what she

But this state of affairs could not last. One morning the doctor Parisio declared that it was necessary to think of the salvation of the Pope's soul. This time it was Donna Olimpia who tried to prolong the number of days by throwing an amount of uncertainty on the diagnosis of the doctor. But Parisio was as firm in his decision now as he had been prudent and uncertain the first time he had been questioned. The doctor had fulfilled his promise to Olimpia in warning her of the first danger. But without losing an instant, he went to carry the news to the officers of Innocent, and told them that the life of the Pontiff was in danger. Parisio then returned to the sick-room, when he found Donna Olimpia pale and changed, holding the hand of her brother-in-law. Either she had told him of his condition, or the Pope had guessed it in seeing her sorrow, and he appeared to have regained calm and presence of mind.

"The time has come," he said, "the will of God be done!" Parisio knelt at the bedside and told the Pope that it was now time for His Holiness to think of the duties of a Christian in passing to a better life.

Innocent tried to join his hands; he lowered his eyes and murmured a prayer—as long as it lasted Donna Olimpia and Parisio fixed their eyes upon him, uncertain how the news would affect the old man. Innocent was firm, resigned, and grand, now that he felt himself near eternity. He thanked Donna Olimpia with dignity for her care of him.



In the words he addressed to her, it was easy to see that his mind already wending to the other world, judged quite differently of what passes in this. The veil of illusions had fallen suddenly, and he found that the severe judgments that had been spoken against him were just. 'My sister,' he said "unite your prayers with those of others who pray to God for us for we are great sinners."

In using the collective form he made a great impression on Donna Olimpia. She understood that for the first time he saw her now as he had never seen her before. All illusions had been destroyed.

On the following day the Cardinals were called by the Pope, who asked for extreme unction and the report of the death of the Pontiff was spread throughout Rome. But by one of those sudden changes of health of which he had given so many examples the Pope found himself much better. A wound on his leg opened and he regained sufficient strength for a day to deceive every one except his doctor.

Cardinal Arzolini always lying in wait to know what was happening at the Pope's palace, did not fail to inform Donna Olimpia of this unlooked-for event. Very naturally Donna Olimpia made up her mind to go to see the Pope. She arrived at the Quirinal without being recognised. All the apartments were empty, no servant was at his post, and the ante-chambers so often filled with courtiers and people begging favours were deserted. This was towards the end of December, but nothing had

been done to warm the rooms; and in the room adjoining the Pontiff's apartment she found poor Pablo shivering with cold.

At the sight of the Princess, the old Spaniard, accustomed so long to obey her, rose, and was just going to open the door of the room for her. But suddenly he remembered his new duties, and he told her in reverential and humble terms that she could go no farther. Although the explanations which followed were held in whispers, they were heard in the death-chamber, and soon the door of the Pope's room opened, and Paul Oliva came out. With a noble but severe look, stretching out his hand towards the door by which she had entered, and in a manner gently pushing her, he said, when they had arrived at the second room, "Madonna, what brings you here?"

"The very natural desire, father," said Donna Olimpia, frightened perhaps for the first time in her life, "to see my relation."

"Your feelings mislead you, Princess," answered the Jesuit with cold politeness. "His Holiness no longer belongs to the world. He performed yesterday the last religious action which detaches him from the world for ever. I am charged to keep his soul clean from all worldly stain which might soil his purity."

Innocent's confessor did not allow Donna Olimpia to respond, but gently indicating the second and third doors through which she passed, he led her to the staircase, where, after having saluted her,

telling her not to come again to the Quirinal he followed her with his eye until she left the palace. Meanwhile the truth had spread in Rome—what ever changes had taken place in the Pope's health only a few days remained to him. During the last week no cardinal or bishop went to the Quirinal. The upper servants had abandoned him and only the lower servants remained who robbed him of everything they could appropriate. Pablo sought in vain for clean sheets to make his master's bed and there were not enough coverings to keep out the cold. It was in this state of deprivation forsaken by all the world that the Head of the Roman Church died one of the principal Sovereigns of Europe.

Donna Olimpia was now tormented with one thought the election of the successor of her brother in law. She trembled at the prospect of seeing one of her many enemies ascending the throne of St Peter. Innocent's successor—unanimously elected—was Cardinal Chigi who took the name of Alexander VII.

For Alexander VII as for Donna Olimpia the question was reduced to this. Would the sister in law of Innocent X be admitted to the new Court or not?

Alexander was a singular man but his peculiarity had not been perceived up to this time. The day of his election when he was carried to St Peter's for the ceremony of *Adoration* he was in tears and they were unable to make him be seated on the middle of

the altar, so that, according to custom, they might kiss his feet. Timid and ashamed, he kept so much on one side that many times he nearly fell off. In a few words he swore to be just and not to surround himself with his family ; and one of his first acts was to place his coffin beside his bed, so that he should never lose the thought of death.

By an extraordinary contradiction he showed at the same time his taste for luxury. His apartments were furnished with elegance. For his Pontifical vestments he chose the finest materials, and only employed the most skillful workers. This mixture of sumptuousness and austerity served him well with the Roman people, who flattered themselves that they had a Pope according to their taste, since he accorded them strict justice and gave them fine ceremonies. At the moment when Donna Olimpia entered the Quirinal, Alexander was engaged in trying on a pair of red shoes, decorated with a golden cross, which Lazzaqua, the first shoemaker, had just brought

"Lazzaqua," said the Pope to him, "these shoes are badly cut and badly sewn, and besides that, you have been too careful with the gold in embroidering the crosses."

"Holy Father, as to the gold crosses I observe humbly that I have embroidered them exactly as commanded by your predecessor. the gold is not pure."

"That is wrong, Lazzaqua," said the Pope, "all that touches the servant of the servants of God

must be pure ; and if custom were not contrary I would have these crosses in diamonds, because the diamond is purer than gold Do you hear, Lazzagua ? "

" Yes, Holy Father."

Then Alexander placed his foot upon his coffin to show the faults in the shoe. " In the same way, he who works at the vestments of the successor of St. Peter must neglect nothing to make them perfect. See, the stitching is slack. The cut is not sufficiently sloping, and the foot is not well-supported : you must begin again, Lazzagua."

" As it pleases His Holiness, but—— "

" Well, what ? "

" The Holy Father will allow his chamberlain to arrange with me—— "

" On the price, no doubt ? How much do you get for these shoes ? "

" Ten Roman crowns, Holy Father."

" You will get fifty if they are such as I wish."

This conversation finished when Cardinal Rospi-ghiosi, Secretary of State since the accession of Alexander, came in with an anxious look and addressed some words in the ear of the Pope to warn him that Donna Olimpia was in the antechamber, proposing to offer gifts to His Holiness, and expecting the favour to make her reverence to him.

Without showing emotion, Alexander told Lazzagua to put his shoes on, and begged Rospi-ghiosi to send for the master of ceremonies

" Let the officer who accompanies the lady come

in," he said to him. And as Lazzaqua, out of respect, was leaving the room: "Stay," said the Pope, "I have still something to say to you."

The officer of Donna Olimpia was introduced, followed by two pages, each carrying a gold vase destined for His Holiness. The messenger carried out his commission in offering the gifts from his mistress, who asked permission to kiss the feet of His Holiness.

"Tell the Princess," said Alexander, in a firm voice, but very calmly, "that I do not accept her presents, that in my reign a woman shall not obtain audience except for the most important business. Go"; and as the officer and the pages hesitated, "Go out!" added he, with a slight movement of impatience.

Lazzaqua had the same feeling of hatred for Donna Olimpia that all the Romans had, so he felt extreme satisfaction, which he could scarcely contain in hearing the new Pope refuse the proud Princess admittance. Joy and enthusiasm were painted on his face when Alexander addressed him again.

"I wanted, dear Lazzaqua," said the Pope, who pretended that he had not seen the tears of admiration in the eyes of the workman, "I wanted to beg you to serve us promptly. The ceremonies of St. John Lateran take place in a few days, so I count on your diligence." Lazzaqua was silent: he had been so much astonished by what he had seen and heard. He threw himself on his knees, and without daring to touch Alexander's foot, he kissed

the ground at some distance, received the Papal benediction and retired.

As no doubt the Pontiff had foreseen the testimony of Lazzagua, present at the refusal of Donna Olimpia, was not without fruit. Lazzagua had nothing more important to do than to tell the details of it to his neighbours. And in less than an hour the whole city knew of the boldness of Donna Olimpia and of the severity the Pope had shown her.

"There is a Pope," said one; "who will get rid of this leech."

Up to this moment the excitement caused by the virtues of the new Pope filled all minds, and the thoughts of vengeance against Donna Olimpia were lulled. But when the news of the Pope's refusal had been passed from mouth to mouth, with the usual exaggerations, a concert of voices rose, demanding justice for the crimes committed by her. Alexander himself, who had only wished to show signs of severity, was afraid at the violence of the accusations brought against her. He was divided by the wish to appear just to the people, and the desire to be propitious to the family of Donna Olimpia—a condition which had been imposed upon him in the Conclave by the Barberini. He recognised the difficulty and felt that great prudence was necessary.

As for Donna Olimpia, astounded by the manner in which she had been forbidden the Pontifical palace, she kept her bed since the shock

caused by the humiliation. The only member of her family from whom she would accept any attention was her son Don Camillo.

Public calamities and the plague are most powerful distractions in turning aside the ordinary course of human passions. In spite of the desperation with which the charges had been levelled against Donna Olimpia by her victims, that she should make restitution and return the wealth she had accumulated, the accusers were shocked by the terrible scourge which, coming from Sardinia through Naples, burst upon Rome. All hatred was forgotten. The tribunals were closed. This alone would have been enough to prevent the affairs of Donna Olimpia receiving consideration, but the dreadful plague, which every one feared so much, and the riots which made the danger so much greater, caused people to stifle revenge and to busy themselves with plans of saving their lives. But while human justice was dormant the justice of God was awake. From Rome the plague penetrated into Viterbo, and knocked at the door of the palace of Donna Olimpia. She asked the Pope's permission to flee to San Martino. Her request was granted, but her escape did not save her. The plague had marked her as a victim, and she died in her retreat. Her death gave rise to satirical verses, *pasquinades*, one of which satires described a scene at the gates of Purgatory. Innocent was in vain demanding admittance he was refused, as he was unable to pay his entrance-fee, having



been deprived of all his possessions by his sister-in-law, whilst the latter triumphantly penetrated into Purgatorio

Her son, helped by two confidential persons, accomplished the painful duty of transferring the corpse from San Martino to Rome, with prudence and courage. But at the moment when the body of Donna Olimpia was raised to be placed on the stretchers, her head, borne down by its own weight, fell to one side, and four large diamonds escaped from her mouth. She had probably placed them there to avoid being robbed of them by strangers after her death. The Prince, who knew the stones to be worth about one thousand dollars, placed them in a vessel. It was a strange sight these diamonds escaping from this shapeless body, and it really seemed as if Donna Olimpia, who had spent all her life in gathering together riches, gave up the ghost only at that moment. She died as she had lived, selfish and avaricious, hated by everybody. Unlike other courtesans of the Church, she only thought of herself, never of the independence of her